

UNVEILING THE TRUTH BRINGS JOY IN THE MORNING:  
HEALING THROUGH TELLING  
GRIEF AND AFTER DEATH  
COMMUNICATION  
STORIES

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                               |      |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|
| ABSTRACT.....                                 | vi   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....                         | viii |
| EPIGRAPH.....                                 | ix   |
| INTRODUCTION.....                             | 1    |
| CHAPTER                                       |      |
| 1 A LIFE AND MINISTRY IN APPALACHIA.....      | 3    |
| The Womb, Birth and Thirty Years Later        |      |
| The Lights Go Out Until Eighteen Months Later |      |
| A Dying Girl                                  |      |
| First Encounter of Racism                     |      |
| Lord, Have Mercy!                             |      |
| In Appalachia                                 |      |
| 2 RESOURCE REVIEW.....                        | 22   |
| Review of the Literature                      |      |
| Grief Models                                  |      |
| Practical Support Methods                     |      |
| After Death Communication                     |      |
| 3 BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....   | 43   |
| Biblical Foundations                          |      |
| Death and Life After Death in the Bible       |      |
| Grief in the Bible                            |      |

|            |                                                     |     |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|
|            | After Death Communication in the Bible              |     |
|            | Theological Foundations                             |     |
|            | Theology of Grief                                   |     |
|            | Theology of Care/Comfort                            |     |
|            | Theology of Storytelling                            |     |
|            | Theology of After Death Communication               |     |
| 4          | RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....                | 60  |
|            | Research Design                                     |     |
|            | Methodology                                         |     |
|            | Contextual and Professional Associates' Evaluations |     |
| 5          | DOING THE RESEARCH.....                             | 66  |
|            | Collection of Data                                  |     |
|            | Selected Data                                       |     |
|            | Personal Biases                                     |     |
|            | Analysis of Data Collected                          |     |
| 6          | REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....             | 76  |
|            | Evaluation and Conclusions                          |     |
|            | Into the Future                                     |     |
| APPENDICES |                                                     |     |
| A          | LETTER TO RESPONDENTS REQUESTING PARTICIPATION..... | 86  |
| B          | PERMISSION FORM FOR STUDY RESPONDENTS.....          | 88  |
| C          | DATA: RESPONDENTS' STORIES SHARED.....              | 90  |
| D          | PHONE SURVEY INTRODUCTION.....                      | 110 |

|   |                                            |     |
|---|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| E | PHONE SURVEY.....                          | 112 |
| F | LISTEN.....                                | 114 |
| G | A NEPHEW AND FRIEND'S COMPOSITION.....     | 116 |
| H | CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON BIBLICAL VIEWS..... | 118 |
|   | Death and Life After Death                 |     |
|   | Grief in the Bible                         |     |
|   | BIBLIOGRAPHY.....                          | 135 |

## **ABSTRACT**

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Through examination of the grief experiences of twelve Appalachian respondents, this doctoral project explores grief, bereavement and the healing process; specifically, whether or not and how bereaved individuals have experienced After Death Communication from deceased loved ones. This study also considers the utility of a bereavement facility. A phenomenological study was conducted through personal

interviews, written and oral stories and a phone survey. The author offers her personal stories of grief.

Respondents were willing to share their experiences and evaluations, and the research concludes from their responses that grief is a natural, healing process when fully experienced and shared; that After Death Communication can facilitate healthy bereavement; and that a bereavement facility would be welcomed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank her family for their support throughout her life, and especially through the process of completing this doctoral project. She also thanks her mentors, professional associates and context associates for their advice and encouragement. Special thanks are due to the twelve respondents in this project, who so graciously shared their grief stories and reactions, which are the body of research, and truly the heart of the project. The author appreciates the permission of Kenneth Ferrell and Ted Barnett to include their unpublished original poem, *'Tis a Far Better Place*. The author also thanks those many others who have, through the years, shared stories of their loss, grief and After Death Communication experiences, planting the seeds from which this project has grown. This project could not have been completed without all this help and support given to the author.

Weeping may endure for a night,

But joy comes in the morning.

Psalm 30:5

## INTRODUCTION

The work of grieving happens between remembering and hoping, between building a treasured memory and anticipating a new future.<sup>1</sup>

Grief, as experienced by the bereaved at the death of a loved one; the process of bereavement; the part After Death Communication (ADC) experience plays in the bereavement process; and how bereavement can be facilitated by sharing personal stories of grief with others constitute the focus of this doctoral project.

Twelve Appalachian respondents and the author share their experiences of grief when a loved one has died, including experiences of ADC from the deceased. By openly sharing their experiences of ADC, the respondents unveil stories that have been hidden from others and communicate the joy and peace that they have obtained as a result of communication with the deceased.

The questions which guide this study include:

1. How do the respondents describe their grief for the deceased?
2. How do they describe the intimate spiritual experience of communication from their deceased loved ones?
3. Would it be helpful for the bereaved to have a safe place to experience their sharing of grief with others?

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Herbert, *Moments of Loss, Seasons of Grief* (Circuit Rider, September-October 2005), 22.

In Chapter One, the author introduces herself and provides the basis for her selection of grief as the focus of this project by telling her personal life story. Chapter One also introduces Appalachia, and specifically Morgantown, West Virginia, and the surrounding area, as the geographic and cultural context for this project.

Chapter Two explores the nature of grief, bereavement, and After Death Communication through a review of recent relevant literature and presents the current state of the art.

Chapter Three lays the biblical foundation by drawing out passages from the Bible<sup>2</sup> relating to death, grief, and After Death Communication.<sup>3</sup> These concepts are then located theologically, and the basis for this area of Christian ministry within the discipline of practical theology is identified.

In Chapter Four, the author reveals the model for her research: selecting a group of respondents who will 1) share written and oral stories of their experiences of grief, 2) respond to a phone survey relating to after death communication and 3) indicate their interest in a possible bereavement facility. The author also discusses the choice of qualitative, first-person and existential phenomenological research as the primary methodology.

Chapter Five describes the implementation of this model for research, including the collection of data, and their analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> A fuller examination of biblical foundations in their historical and cultural context is presented in Appendix H.

Chapter Six contains reflections on the author's research, how the model was modified, what might have been done differently, what was learned, evaluations, conclusions and plans for future action based on the author's experience.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A LIFE AND MINISTRY IN APPALACHIA

Loving Spirit, loving Spirit, you have chosen me to be—  
you have drawn me to your wonder; you have set your sign on me.  
Like a mother you enfold me, hold my life within your own,  
feed me with your very body, form me of your flesh and bone.  
Like a father you protect me, teach me, the discerning eye,  
hoist me up upon your shoulder; let me see the world from high.  
Friend and lover, in your closeness I am known and held and blessed:  
In your promise is my comfort; in your presence I may rest.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE MESSAGE

Angels walking, smiling, speaking,  
Expressing love and peace from God.  
Pleasant faces with care and true devotion.  
Their message from God is simple, yet powerful:  
You can do it with faith.<sup>2</sup>

Reflecting on the past, present and future, the author opens the door of storytelling to share her personal life journey. Her narrative is creative, at times in verse, including scriptures and words from meaningful hymns.

From the beginning, in her mother's womb, God has been preparing the author for this doctoral project and her future ministries with Appalachian people. She cannot understand or explain it all now, but one day it all will be revealed.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray, Shirley Erena, in *The Faith We Sing*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), No. 2123.

<sup>2</sup> Allen-Villinger, Elizabeth, *Joy in the Morning*, (Morgantown, WV: self-published, 2000), 23.

## **The Womb, Birth and Thirty Years Later**

*For with God nothing will be impossible.*

An angel appears to Mary, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.” Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God.”  
(Lk 1:27-28, 30 Amplified Bible)

Five years into their marriage, a hard-working Virginia couple hears the good news—do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. Married late, the husband is forty-five and his wife is thirty-five. It is a miracle for this couple to hear the words from their doctor, “You are going to have a baby.”

Days, weeks, months and seasons pass, leaving these soon-to-be parents waiting for the moment of truth. This beautiful woman gives birth to a baby girl. The author’s life begins in early spring, a time for birth and growth, when emerging life is pushed out of secure surroundings and exposed to a different atmosphere. In most cases, the bringing forth is a promising and hopeful new beginning. Entering this world in March, along with seeds of all sorts, pushing, pushing from that which is concealed in the warmth of Mother Nature, there is just enough space for her to emerge into this world of contraction and confusion. It is the time of World War II.

During her nine comfortable, protected months, Father, Mother and others talk about the event of the day, anticipating the arrival of their newborn baby. Finally the time comes to push or swim down from a mass of warmth into hands covered with sterile latex gloves. And what a surprise: bright lights, hospital staff, blankets, nose syringe and medical instruments now out of date. What’s a newborn to do but let out a loud cry? The nurse rushes over, bringing a warm bundle to this beautiful brown-skinned woman in the

bed. The mother holds her newborn in her warm arms and says, “I love you.” It is hours before she and her father meet—in those days, fathers were not allowed into the delivery room to witness the birth of their children. After a few days the new parents take their baby home.

### **The Lights Go Out Until Eighteen Months Later**

Eighteen months later, the author’s first brother was born at home. She remembers seeing him on a table while Mother’s sister changed his diaper. Her aunt lived with them for several years, helping Mother with the children as the family grew. Seeing her baby brother for the first time and watching her aunt’s wedding are the two first events the author can remember. The wedding, held at home in the living room, was beautiful. The bride and groom stood in front of the big coal stove, the family’s source of heat during the winter. The preacher, robed in black, stood in front of the couple with the family behind him, waiting for that unveiling moment. The young couple gazed into each other’s eyes as the preacher held his Bible in his hands and read the marriage vows. At the end of a brief ceremony, the preacher pronounced to the bride and groom, “You are now husband and wife.” It was summertime, and the beautiful dark red climbing roses on the front porch greeted the young couple as they walked outside after the ceremony. Everyone was happy and expressing their love to the newlyweds.

The family grew fast in the first ten years. Father and Mother were proud parents of eight children. They lived a few miles from town, a great place for children to play and learn about nature. They had their own playground, about an acre of ground with many trees and animals. Big blackheart cherry trees, black walnut trees, apple trees and one huge pear tree provided a place to play. With her brothers, the author always tried to see

who could climb the highest, but her sister, five years younger, was too small to climb. The younger sister would follow them to the fields, though, swinging on wild grapevines and playing with the neighborhood kids. Mother and Father didn't worry about the children playing outside because it was safe and the whole neighborhood looked out for each other. Father enjoyed teaching his children about animals and how to grow vegetables in the garden. They had dogs, cats, ducks and rabbits for pets. There was always food for everyone at home, and enough to share with neighbors. They all had a great time together.

During the week Mother cared for them—cooking, washing clothes, cleaning the house, getting the children ready for school during the week and church on Sundays. Holidays were times of excitement, surprises and the smell of good food cooking on the kitchen stove. Father would always wait until Christmas Eve to take them to the woods behind their house. There they would find the largest white pine tree for their beautiful Christmas tree. They would drag it to the house, Father leading the way, carrying the trunk of the tree. The living room ceiling was twelve feet and their trees were always over fourteen feet, so Father would get out his saw and cut the tree to fit the room. Oh, the smell of the tree! The sap from the cut trunk and branches gave the room a fresh pine scent. Mother would find all the Christmas decorations and together they would decorate the tree.

It was a tradition for Father to cook for all the holidays. He would start the night before and cook until the next morning. On Christmas Eve, Mother and Father would put the youngsters to bed early. Although the children would talk trying to stay awake and pass the time away, their little eyes would soon close and sleep would sweep over them

like a cloud covering the moon. Father, a kid at heart, would wake the children early Christmas morning around four or five. There were times when Father could not wait to see the surprise and joy on their faces. One Christmas, Father woke them up around two in the morning. Mother said, "It is early, let the children sleep until daybreak." Father said, "Get them up to see what Santa Claus left for them." On Christmas Day the children played with their toys and games while Father and Mother watched and relaxed. Friends would stop by and could not leave without celebrating and eating food prepared by Father. The author will always remember those joyful days of her childhood.

### **A Dying Girl**

*Don't worry! Have faith, and your daughter will get well.*

Everyone had been waiting for Jesus, and when he came back, a crowd was there to welcome him. Just then the man in charge of the Jewish meeting place came and knelt down in front of Jesus. His name was Jairus, and he begged Jesus to come to his home because his twelve-year-old child was dying. . . . While Jesus was speaking someone came from Jarius' home and said, "Your daughter has died! Why bother the teacher anymore?" When Jesus heard this, he told Jarius, "Don't worry! Have faith, and your daughter will get well." . . . Everyone was crying and weeping for the girl. But Jesus said, "The child isn't dead. She is just asleep."  
(Lk 8:40-42, 49-54 Contemporary English Version)

During her childhood, the author was told that she was a sick child with a heart murmur and rheumatic fever. She does not remember being sick until entering school, primary grade, at age seven. In the third grade, she was homebound before spring break. Every day during the week, a teacher came to her home for several hours during the morning. During this time of her life, she was not allowed to go outside and play with her brothers and little sister, and spent most of that time in bed resting.

It became a routine for Mother and her to visit Virginia University Hospital for her medical check-ups. Father worked out of town with the Norfolk and Western Railroad Company Monday through Friday, and could not always go with them, but he would make arrangements with a friend to drive them to the hospital. There were tears in Mother's eyes one day after the hospital visit, and the author heard Mother saying to someone, "She is a sick little child and she could die before long." Before this gray news, the author was Father's little princess and Mother's little sick child. There was nothing her parents, family and friends would not do for her if it were within their power. She was not in agony or distress about death because Mother prayed day and night for her, Father prayed, the ministers prayed, and in her mind she was happy and fearless. She did not think about dying or leaving her family.

Soon, in the fourth grade, the author's health improved and she was back in school. The community, doctors, nurses from home and the university hospital all treated her with care and honor. She was their miracle child. Their vision for her was high achievement, to complete high school and to enter college. In those days there were few African-Americans thinking about college after high school. In the sixties, after high school, most of the students were thinking about working and starting families. Years passed and the author would become known as the good girl who liked to study and expected respect and honesty.

The memories of the most significant person in her life are from her father. He taught her at a young age to respect others and herself. He would often tell her there were no limits to what she could achieve, regardless of her race and sex. And he would look at her and say, "You can do it. It might take a little longer than most. You can do it. Have

faith.” Father and Mother did not go to college or finish high school, but they believed in education and taught their children that they were important to them and the world because they were loved by them and the Lord. And no one could take this special gift from them, ever. The author’s parents and community believed in her and that the power of God would strengthen her and make her whole.

Mother introduced God to the author through her faith and believing that one day her daughter would become strong and healthy, a caring person who loves the Lord. Father taught his daughter to love, to be herself and to be independent and reliable. Both Father and Mother believed that with God all things are possible. To make a long story short, in answer to their faith and prayers, the author became stronger and healthy.

### **First Encounter of Racism**

The author grew up in a neighborhood where people didn’t stop to check out the color of your skin or your race. This neighborhood was predominantly Black, located between town and a larger, predominantly White neighborhood. In their little neighborhood there were Black grocery stores and Black professionals—a doctor, dentist and many teachers who taught at the Black elementary school. As the author remembers, Blacks and Whites in the larger community were friendly with each other, but their churches and schools were segregated. Because of state laws, she went to an all-Black grade school.

Eventually, the author’s family moved to a neighborhood closer to town because of her weak health. Their new house was smaller than the home they had lived in before. There was a bigger house up the hill, but Father and Mother said she would not be able to

climb the hill. Father bought the small house and they all moved into it—her parents, five boys and three girls. The youngest child was her baby sister, less than one year old, who would die unexpectedly at the age of sixteen months from pneumonia.

I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!  
(Rom 8:38-39 CEV)

The author hesitated for a moment to share the stories about racism, but these stories are part of her journey. So she shares the following stories to show a different type of grief, which has helped to give her strength and courage to become the person she is today.

In the early sixties, Black high school students were bused to a school in a different county, about twenty-five to thirty miles from the author's home in southwestern Virginia. She went to the Black high school for one semester before Father found out that the school board would take applications from Black families with high school students who would want to integrate the White high school. One day after school, he said to her, "You have an opportunity to go to school in our county just about two miles from home. Would you like to go?" Father said he would take her to town for the interview with the County Board of Education. The author thanks God for her parents, who believed in their children and were willing to stand up for their children's education.

As she reflects on it now, the interview went well, with Father by her side in a little room. There may have been bright lights, but the author recalls feeling only dim gray and coldness as the board members asked Father and her questions: "Why do you want to go to school here? What are your grades like? Do you think you can keep up your

grades in a new school?” The bottom line of all their questioning was, “Are you good enough to attend our school?”

The author was accepted by the County Board of Education to attend her hometown high school. And, she thought, finally all students would go to the same school to become a big loving family. In 1961-62, the community’s history suddenly broke into open rupture with the first five Black students integrating the county high school. From the beginning of this new challenge, separation between the Black and White students was alive and well. This experience is the author’s first awareness of racism. A new beginning, a new way of seeing what is! The hands of injustice sewed the red thread of racism through the fabric of her experience, and each stitch added an unwelcome part into her life forever.

The eyeshade draws down from the author’s eyes, leaving a mere glimpse of that first day. Five brave Black students integrated their hometown high school. There were no problems one could easily identify. The White students appeared to be friendly, and most of the teachers were doing their job. The Black students were caught between two worlds, squeezed and turned like fine Concord grapes. Their Black friends who did not go to their school could not understand why they chose the county high school, and their White classmates did not socialize with them after school hours. The author became lonely and isolated for friendship, dating, hanging out after school and weekends, but there were no White males brave enough to date a Black female in public.

After a while the author found true love—expressing her creativity through art. This love was so great she could go anywhere to escape the chains of racism that held her in confinement. Her art teacher was kind, sincere, and saw something special within her.

In class, her teacher would praise her and tell her how much she enjoyed the author's art. The author earned the honor of being the best art student in class and everyone knew it was true.

Her senior year, teachers chose the best seniors in class for Senior Award Day. A few days before the awards were presented, her art teacher left the room and was gone for about ten minutes. When the teacher came back, her face was red and tears were in her eyes. She looked at the author as if to say without words, "I am sorry our school will not present you with the award for the best art student of the year." Senior Award Day came, and once more, sadness came over the author like a dark cloud covering the earth. The author's imperfect world came falling down when a White classmate's name was called out for the art award. Yet, after all the disappointments she encountered during those high school years, she still thinks about how she was able to overcome several challenges in school because of her love for art.

The first five Black students to integrate the county high school graduated and went on to college out-of-state. The local Black Methodist Church and Black colleges out-of-state took these students under their wings, and they all learned to fly and give back to their community. All things are possible with God.

The author's father died before she finished college, a few days before Father's Day in June. His death left her mind in a state of incompleteness. Second semester of college had ended in May and she went home to be with her family. Her father died of a stroke in the same hospital where her baby sister had died of pneumonia.

For thus says the Lord: Behold. I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream: then you will be nursed, you will be carried on her hip and trotted

(lovingly bounced up and down) on her (God's maternal) knees.  
(Is 66:12 AB)

The author's faith was further developed and strengthened as, over time, she healed from the loss of her father. She is blessed each time she hears Thomas Ken's words to the following doxology:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below:  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise God, the source of all our gifts!  
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts!  
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit!  
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!<sup>3</sup>

**Lord, Have Mercy!**

The author has the assurance that God is good to her every second of the day. There are many stories she can tell that reveal the presence of God, guarding angels and the spirits of those who have passed from this world. Thanks to God and her father's guiding spirit, she finished college with a BS degree in Art Education and Literature. Throughout school, her involvement with the church prepared her to say yes when she heard God's call. God called her into the ministry to preach the good news of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The author married a minister, and two years later they celebrated the birth of their first child, a daughter. Two years after their first blessing, they were blessed with their second child, a son, and two years after the birth of their son the author became a full-time United Methodist minister appointed to a four-point charge.

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<sup>3</sup> Ken, Thomas, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), No. 94.

One Sunday morning, rain covered the fall leaves on the road where she traveled to church, about twenty miles from home. The strong wind blew the leaves onto the wet road, and as the author drove over a bridge she lost control of the car. She fought bravely with the steering wheel, trying to regain control of her car, yet she soon realized she could not stop the car from rolling down the steep hill with her in it. The author knew her life was coming to an end, and again peace came over her like a cloud, a protective shield. She was ready to give her life up to her Lord. The last words from her mouth were, "Lord, Have Mercy." She believed she was on her way out of this world. Suddenly, her car stopped in the middle of the wet road, and she could not believe it.

I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid.  
You are with me, and your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe.  
(Ps 23:4 CEV)

The author believes that good spirits have been appointed and ordained to watch over God's chosen ones as they do the work God has called them to do here on earth. After her car stopped, God's peace lifted her head up from the steering wheel, and as she looked around in front of the car there were no other cars on the road. She opened the car door, and to her surprise as she walked around it, she saw no major damage. As she started back, she looked behind the car to see if any cars were on the road. To her right, on the other side of the road, in a misty gray color, she saw a vehicle parked. It appeared to be a truck. Seated inside, a human figure, also dressed in gray, was watching over her. The author believes God sent an angel to stop her car and to protect her from danger. It was a miracle that morning—her life was spared to continue her spiritual growth on earth for a little longer. Little did she know at the time that her younger brother would die in a boating accident about the same time her life was spared that day. This is an airy and graceful experience, which to this day, continues to deepen her faith.

It has been over two decades since God spared the author's life that wet Sunday morning. And now, in 2006, she still resides in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, wild, wonderful West Virginia. She retired from the ministry in 2004. She has a super family, with a retired husband and two wonderful and beautiful adult children who finished high school in West Virginia with honors and both attended colleges of their choice for undergraduate and graduate school. She believes her family is blessed by God, and she is blessed to have had such an understanding family throughout her ministry.

The author has now entered into a new phase of her ministry, grief ministry. Although her journey in life has been long, with many bumps and curves, she is looking forward with her eyes focused on the Light (Jesus) for guidance and peace along the way. The author will travel this lonely road, and through her work with the grieving and bereaved in Appalachia, she hopes to help others along the way discover a new beginning.

The author cannot explain all the good and bad things that happen in her life, but she knows who holds tomorrow. Ira F. Stamphill wrote around 1978 the following words that have touched her soul.

#### I KNOW WHO HOLDS TOMORROW

I don't know about tomorrow, I just live from day to day.  
 I don't borrow from its sunshine, for its skies may turn to gray.  
 I don't worry o'er the future, for I know what Jesus said,  
 And today I'll walk beside Him, for He knows what is ahead.  
 Many things about tomorrow, I don't seem to understand;  
 But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Stamphill, Ira, *Songs of Zion*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), No. 29.

## **In Appalachia**

The context for this Doctor of Ministry project is Morgantown and Monongalia County, West Virginia, and surrounding counties in West Virginia, as well as locations in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. The city of Morgantown is the seat of Monongalia County. The 2000 census data show the county population to be 81,866, an increase of 8.4% from 1970.

Morgantown is located on the Monongahela River near the Pennsylvania border in the north central part of West Virginia, nestled at the heart of the Appalachian Mountain range, which stretches nearly 1,600 miles across eastern North America. The population of Morgantown is 26,809 (2000 census). According to recent census data, this is one of the major growth areas in the state. Monongalia County was the only north central county to realize population growth for the last 20 years, and has been one of the fastest growing counties in West Virginia during the 1990's. Over the years, Morgantown and Monongalia County have seen some of the lowest unemployment rates in the state.

Major employers in the area include West Virginia University, the largest institution of higher education in the state, with a student enrollment of about 26,000, as well as the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and Mylan Pharmaceuticals.

In the years since its charter in 1785, Morgantown has seen many changes, developing the finest educational, research, industrial, health and transportation facilities in the area. These, along with its healthy business atmosphere, cultural and religious community strengths, assure Morgantown of a bright future. Compared with much of the

rest of West Virginia, Monongalia County has a brighter economic outlook, yet it still shares with the surrounding counties many Appalachian characteristics.

For thirty years, the author has been a minister in the Appalachian Mountains, a region including mountainous parts of the eastern United States characterized by marginal economy, isolation of its people from the US mainstream and distinctive folkways.<sup>5</sup> She has witnessed the beauty of the river valleys and mountain notches. She has also heard the cry for hope, a new day, another time in history, from the people with the slogan, "Mountaineers are always free."

Often ridiculed, mostly by those that live outside the mountains, Appalachian residents have been stereotyped as a result of images portrayed in popular culture. Historically, many groups living in the Appalachian region were severely economically depressed, as well as geographically and socially isolated. Although there are still communities within the mountains that face these issues, most Appalachian communities are very similar to the rest of middle-class America. Even so, several negative images and stereotypes have remained, such as going barefoot; speaking in hillbilly dialect with bad grammar; eating road kill; dirty, smelly or not taking many baths; making clothes from feed sacks; keeping old cars with no wheels up on cement blocks in the front yard; or living in makeshift houses (shacks).

More realistic characteristics of Appalachian people include having close-knit extended families (clans), often drawing to each other and viewing outsiders with suspicion, displaying independence, resisting authority, having strong pride, and maintaining skills in traditional folk arts.

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<sup>5</sup> *Appalachian Mountains*, on Encyclopedia.com.

The fact is, this great land, rich in coal, iron, petroleum, wood, and natural gas,<sup>6</sup> is also rich in strong, independent, resourceful, creative people.

As a female clergy serving small churches, hospitals and non-profit organizations in West Virginia, the author has seen a darker side of the beauty and free-for-all attitude, where she has ministered to the poor and helpless, as well as the rich and powerful. Not long ago, traveling from the northern part of West Virginia to the southern part, she observed the beauty of the area; but also saw where strip mining machines from the coal industry had left the mountains leveled, denuded and raped.

As she observed the hillside from a distance, the author saw the coal veins within the rock formation, which reminded her of the hidden grief that runs through the veins of the Appalachian people with whom she has worked. This hidden grief is echoed in the bluish-gray sky with threads of reddish-orange fire exposed forever, as if the symptoms of an explosion of grief and guilt opened the sky and stained it with drops of red tears. The author has often noticed Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five states of emotional reactions of dying persons in the voices and eyes of Appalachian children and adults. The pain of mistrust and abuse filters into the grief of silence, leaving those who suffer the greatest pain of all with confusion, anger and shame.

Living in Appalachia, the author has related her Doctor of Ministry project, and the ministry it entails, to the grief that occurs here when loved ones die. Her initial plan was to relate her Doctor of Ministry project to the many kinds of grief encountered in Appalachia. She has now decided that her focus should be on this one kind of grief, for her passion is bereavement work with persons who have lost loved ones to death.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

The author's personal experiences of grief have given her a particular sensitivity to the grief of others, and as a result, grief counseling has become an important part of her ministry. Through her own experiences of grief, and her experiences with grieving families, she has developed a deep desire to help others recognize, understand and learn to deal with their grief.

As a setting for the ministry proposed in this Doctor of Ministry project, the author would like to establish a bereavement facility to offer emotional support and friendship, while providing a safe haven for bereaved persons to share their grieving with others as they identify and work through the different stages, such as shock and denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. This facility would provide community outreach services to bereaved individuals of all ages and socio-economic statuses coping with the loss of loved ones. The mission is to provide support to the bereaved and bereavement caregivers from a variety of backgrounds by:

1. Helping individuals to identify and understand the complex emotions that are experienced with loss,
2. Creating an awareness of the internal and external resources that, when utilized, will enable more effective coping with the grief associated with catastrophic life transitions,
3. Providing care and assistance through support groups, educational seminars and workshops on grief-related topics to both lay persons and professional caregivers, and
4. Building a network of support agencies by establishing relationships with hospitals, hospices, funeral homes, schools, universities, churches, agencies

serving victims of natural disasters and other such organizations and institutions.

In acknowledging and working through their grief together, the author believes the people of Appalachia can draw on their great strength, resourcefulness, and traditional reliance on one another to bring healing and new life to the hills that give them shelter—the mountains they call home.

Blessed is she who has believed  
That what the Lord has said to her  
Will be accomplished!  
(Lk 1:45 New International Version)

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESOURCE REVIEW

#### A Review of the Literature

This examination of resources begins with a review of literature and grief models dealing with grief and the process of grieving or bereavement.

Though an older resource, Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson's *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*, (1983), sets forth a comprehensive view of grief as

... a normal emotional response to significant loss, ... a composite of powerful emotions assailing us whenever we lose someone or something we value. Grieving is the intentional work grief-stricken persons engage in, enabling them to return eventually to full, satisfying lives.<sup>1</sup>

This emphasis on loss rather than death (only one, though for most persons the most severe, instance of loss) as the norm for experiences that bring on grief, has been echoed in more recent works. According to Mitchell and Anderson, loss begins with the traumatic separation of birth and continues through life as we are separated from or lose those things, relationships (persons), identities/plans/hopes, functions, roles or familiar systems to which we have become deeply attached. As both attachment and separation

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<sup>1</sup> Mitchell, Kenneth R. and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs* (Louisville: The Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 18.

are inevitable for the sustenance and development of human life, grief when the separations occur is a natural and normal emotional response.<sup>2</sup>

Grief is a complex cluster of emotions, which may include guilt, shame, loneliness, anxiety, anger, terror, bewilderment, emptiness, profound sadness, despair or helplessness, arising in response to a significant loss.<sup>3</sup> Mitchell and Anderson do not consider grief to be a disease or abnormality which needs to be cured or overcome, but rather a natural response to natural losses, to be fully experienced and worked through. Thus, grief is healthy and healing in itself. It only becomes abnormal or pathological when it is denied, suppressed or avoided, or, on the other hand, when it becomes an obsession.<sup>4</sup> Grief is such a unique experience for each individual that it is impossible to generalize as to what would be “normal” grief. Grief can include such new and unexpected experiences as “seeing things” and “hearing voices.”<sup>5</sup>

There is a distinction made between the anticipatory grief of a dying person and that of the surviving loved ones, who are not encouraged to grieve while the dying person is still alive. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ stages of dying are not necessarily the same as the stages of grieving.<sup>6</sup>

Building on these understandings, Mitchell and Anderson set forth appropriate personal and public ministries of caring for those who grieve. They also include very

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 21-22, 36-46.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 56-57.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 59-60.

helpful theological comments throughout, as well as a concluding chapter, “Toward a Theology of Grieving.”<sup>7</sup>

In *The Grief Recovery Handbook (Revised Edition)* (1998), John W. James and Russell Friedman, representing the Grief Recovery Institute, draw upon their own personal experiences of loss and grief to lead other griever through a process of recovery. Their basic understanding of loss and grief is the same as that of Mitchell and Anderson, but their purpose is not to impart intellectual concepts. In this practical handbook, they guide the reader to recovery through “discovering and completing” what was unfinished in the unique relationship involved in the grief-producing loss.<sup>8</sup> To begin with, they help the grieving person to unlearn the many well-meaning but unhelpful, inadequate or damaging clichéd responses so commonly used and taught in our society, and to acknowledge the unique reality of their grief and need for recovery/completion. James and Friedman then lead the reader to the achievement of action-based recovery by a series of small, correct choices. Finally, they offer “the solution,” which is made up of five actions to complete the pain caused by significant loss.

Rabbi Earl A. Grollman, one of the founders of the Good Grief Program, is the editor of *Bereaved Children and Teens* (1995), a collection of essays on children dealing with death and bereavement. As children cannot be protected from the knowledge of death, so they cannot and should not be excluded from grief and mourning.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 163-173.

<sup>8</sup> James, John W. and Russell Friedman, *The Grief Recovery Handbook (Revised Edition)* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), 41.

<sup>9</sup> Grollman, Earl A., ed., *Bereaved Children and Teens* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 16.

This “Support Guide for Parents and Professionals” seeks to help adults treat children with honesty and respect when they encounter death and bereavement at a young age.

In *Letters from Motherless Daughters: Words of Courage, Grief, and Healing* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995)<sup>10</sup>, Hope Edelman presents a collection of letters from daughters who have shared the early loss of their mothers, as a companion volume to her *Motherless Daughters*. Edelman’s personal observation, supported by the experiences of daughters whose letters are shared, is that their grief, though it changes over time, will continue and profoundly affect individuals throughout their lives.

Written by Maggie Callahan and Patricia Kelley, hospice nurses who for more than a decade cared for the terminally ill, *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993) shares the authors’ experiences with dying patients at the end of their life journeys. These stories illustrate how dying individuals communicate their needs and feelings to family members and medical personnel. Chapter Four begins,

People react in many ways to the news of the impending death of someone they love. They may feel shock, disbelief, fear, anger, sadness, or, as often occurs, a continuously shifting blend of these and other strong emotions.<sup>11</sup>

When the author of this project dissertation was a hospice bereavement coordinator and pastoral counselor, *Final Gifts* became one of many books she shared with terminally ill patients and their family members. It is a book for everyone who is

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<sup>10</sup> Edelman, Hope, *Letters From Motherless Daughters: Words of Courage, Grief, and Healing* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Callahan, Maggie and Patricia Kelley, *Final Gifts: Understanding the Special Awareness, Needs, and Communications of the Dying* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993), 32.

currently or has at some point been near someone dying, and also serves as a resource for those who are dying.

*Final Gifts* offers a special knowledge of what dying may be like from dying persons who describe what they are experiencing in symbolic language. By keeping an open mind and listening to dying persons, we can experience an insight of another world through their communication. They tell of the peace in a different place, and they tell of talking with deceased loved ones we cannot see or hear. *Final Gifts* is a book of encouragement and hope.

Because the process of grieving goes on for a very long time, Martha Whitmore Hickman offers *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief* (1993, 2002)<sup>12</sup>.

From the review of these texts and other literature, the researcher offers the following analysis: grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss of any kind. Persons are not abnormal or weak because they experience grief. Grief is an inescapable reality of human existence; at some point in their life each person faces the loss of someone or something dear to them.

Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, in *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs*, state:

The assertion that grief is a lifelong human experience because of the necessity of attachment and the inevitability of loss is theologically as well as psychologically true. Our attachment to people and things of this world is a continuation of God's love for creation.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hickman, Martha Whitmore, *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993; Perennial, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 29.

Jesus knew the meaning of grief and loss. He wept when his friend Lazarus died. He helped Lazarus' sisters to mourn (Jn 11:32-36).

In the Beatitudes, Jesus looks beyond the fact of death and the pain of grief. He looked to the healing process of mourning as essential to the strength and comfort of life. (Mt 5:4). Grieving is a healing process for the bereaved.

Throughout history, stories have been shared about the grief experiences of the bereaved by bereaving family members, caregivers, medical, psychological and theological professionals, as well as through oral and written storytelling, poems, books, art, support groups and other outlets.

In recent years, caregivers and professionals in the field of death and grief have addressed the need to understand the process, stages, phases and tasks of grief.

In explaining the art of ministry of this project, the author will offer resources of grief history, including four known models of grief and their founders. Another component of the bereavement process is also offered to caregivers and professionals for their consideration for a fuller understanding of the bereavement experience: communication from the deceased loved one, also referred to as After Death Communication.

The author found the presentation of grief by Malinda Ann Hill, M.A., outlined in *"Healing Grief Through Art: Art Therapy Bereavement Group Workshops"*<sup>14</sup>, to be closely related to her understanding and experience of grief, so she has followed it in this section.

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<sup>14</sup> Hill, Malinda Ann, *Healing Grief Through Art* in *Drawn Together Resources*, (<http://drawntogether.com/healing.htm>).

According to Hill, normal or uncomplicated grief includes a broad range of feelings and behaviors commonly occurring after a loss, which can be described under four categories:

1. Feelings: Some of the feelings more commonly experienced may include: numbness, fatigue, loneliness, helplessness, yearning, emancipation, relief and guilt. These feelings may occur to varying degrees and in various combinations, because grief is such a unique experience for each individual.
2. Physical Sensations: Often overlooked, physical sensations such as the following may play a significant role in the grieving process: hollowness in stomach, heavy and repeated sighing, tightness in the throat, tightness or heaviness in the chest, aching, loss of appetite or overeating, fatigue or insomnia, muscular weakness, tension and irritability.
3. Cognitions: Thought patterns that may mark the grief experience, such as disbelief, confusion, preoccupation with the deceased, a sense of presence of the deceased and hallucinations are common in the early stages of grieving and usually cease after a short time. Those that persist can trigger feelings leading to depression or anxiety.
4. Behaviors: Behaviors during grieving may include: crying, sighing, sleep disturbances, appetite disturbances, distracted behavior, restless over-activity, social withdrawal, searching and calling out, visiting places or carrying objects that remind the survivor of the deceased.

Hill further posits that the intensity and duration of the grieving process varies greatly depending on the closeness of identification with the deceased, the origin or

nature of the attachment, the mode of death (sudden, expected, violent, peaceful, etc.), historical issues, personality differences and/or social or cultural context.

Mourning is a long-term process, the culmination of which will not be a return to the pre-grief state. The process is completed when a person is able to reinvest his/her emotions back into life, think of the deceased without intense pain, integrate their experience of loss into their life, and move toward investing in a new life without the lost loved one. Hill notes that Worden distinguishes between “mourning,” referring to the process which occurs after a loss, and “grief,” referring to the personal experience of the loss. “Bereavement is a normal process during which people mourn the loss of their loved ones and heal sufficiently to continue life without them.”<sup>15</sup>

Hill cites many studies, from Lindermann (1944) to Worden (1991), showing that unresolved grief is associated with substantial mental health hazards. The recently bereaved are at risk. If their grief is not resolved in a timely and healthy manner, they may manifest pathological anxiety, depression and low self-esteem, which could lead to substance abuse and suicidal thoughts. In addition, unresolved grief could bring on increased physical health risks and ultimately, premature death. Timely intervention to aid in the healthy resolution of grief through facilitating the normal mourning process through to its completion could greatly reduce or avoid many of these psychiatric, psycho-social and somatic complications.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 2.

## Grief Models

Several models of the grieving or bereavement process, including stages, phases, grief work and companioning, have been proposed to help guide the bereaved through to a healthy resolution of their grief.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in *On Death and Dying* (1969), identifies and describes five stages a dying person goes through when they are told they have a terminal illness: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Because her model has become so well known and helpful for the terminally ill, many professionals and caregivers have inappropriately applied it to the bereavement process that a grieving individual experiences following the death of a loved one. While a grieving person may experience some of Kubler-Ross's five stages, her model is not the best for dealing with the many and often conflicting feelings associated with grief, or even with generalized loss.

Nevertheless, because an understanding of these stages may be helpful in some cases of grief, and to help the family, friends and caregivers of the terminally ill as they share the experience of anticipatory grief, Kubler-Ross' five-stage model is outlined below:

1. Denial and Isolation. The initial reaction is to deny the truth or reality of the news of impending death, sometimes coupled with withdrawal from usual social contacts. This stage may be momentary or longer lasting.
2. Anger. Anger may be directed at those persons or conditions blamed for or thought to be responsible for the loss, at oneself, at God or generalized. Anger

may be felt even if, realistically, nothing or no one could have prevented the loss.

3. Bargaining. The person tries to bargain with God. "If I do this, will you stop it from happening?"
4. Depression. In this stage, the person is overcome with feelings of hopelessness, frustration, bitterness, self-pity, numbness, helplessness, lack of control and perhaps feeling suicidal.
5. Acceptance. Not just resignation, but an acceptance of the reality of the situation brings some peace and comfort not found in the previous stages. Realizing the good that may come out of even the worst situation, one chooses to make the experience the most positive one possible.<sup>17</sup>

According to Colin Murray Parkes in *Studies of Grief in Adult Life*, (Pelican, 1972),

The most characteristic feature of grief is not prolonged depression but acute and episodic "pangs". A pang of grief is an episode of severe anxiety and psychological pain. At such a time the lost person is strongly missed and the survivor sobs or cries aloud for him.<sup>18</sup>

Parkes characterizes grief as a process of moving through a series of reactions, the most common of which are: alarm/panic, searching, mitigation, anger/guilt/depression and acceptance/reorganization. These phases are not necessarily consecutive, but may be experienced in different orders and combinations, because of the uniqueness of persons and circumstances:

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<sup>17</sup> Memorial Hospital, Towanda PA, (<http://www.memorialhospital.org/Library/general/stress-THE-3.html>).

<sup>18</sup> Royal Holloway University of London, *Student Counseling Service*, (<http://www.ad.shul.ac.uk/counseling/loss.html>), 1.

1. Alarm/Panic. Bereavement is stressful. Preparation for fight or flight is the primary physical response, involving panic, restlessness and irritability. Appetite loss, weight loss, sleep difficulty, digestive disturbances, palpitations, headaches and muscular aches and pains may occur.
2. Searching. Preoccupation with the deceased, including searching for or visiting the places where the deceased person might be found or calling out for them can result in difficulty in concentrating on anything else, loss of interest in personal appearance and in things that are usually pleasurable.
3. Mitigation. To ease the pain of grieving, the bereaved may maintain a feeling that the deceased is still nearby, though unseen or unheard. Dreams about the deceased are common. They choose to disbelieve what has happened, denying its reality and avoiding people and situations that remind them of it. They may feel numbness, tension or experience illness.
4. Anger/Guilt/Depression. Both anger and the decline of courage and aggressiveness are natural components of grief. Bouts of anger may be interspersed with repressive withdrawal and apathy. Anger, irritability and bitterness are felt more often in the earlier, “yearning,” part of this stage, giving way, then, to a mood of depression or despair. In the face of insecurity and a lack of faith in the orderliness or trustworthiness of the world, there is often a need to blame someone or something, even oneself, to try to make some sense of the situation. “Why...?” and “Because...” may lead to guilt as well as blame.

5. Acceptance/Reorganization. A major loss such as the death of a loved one affects almost everything about us: our looks, feelings, interests, temperament or role which defines our identity. When we accept the loss, our adjustment to a new and different reality necessitates a reorganization of our lives in many ways.<sup>19</sup>

Worden (1991), in reaction to a perceived passivity inherent in the stages model, developed a more active grieving model. This model outlines four tasks necessary to be completed by the bereaved.

Phases imply a certain passivity, something the mourner must pass through. Tasks, on the other hand, are much more consonant with Freud's concept of grief work and imply that the mourner needs to take action and can do something.<sup>20</sup>

According to Worden's model, though each person's grief reaction will be unique, the work of bereavement generally entails these developmental tasks:

1. To accept the reality of the loss. The first reaction of many to the death of a loved one may be numbness, shock and denial. The first task of grieving is to realize and acknowledge the reality of the death, emotionally as well as intellectually. Traditional rituals such as wakes and funerals help many to move toward acceptance.
2. To work through to the pain of grief. Though many seek to ignore or avoid the pain associated with loss, it is necessary to acknowledge and work through it, or it will manifest itself through less healthy symptoms. Realizing that the intensity of pain and how it is experienced will vary greatly from person to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Worden, 35, quoted in Hill, 4.

person, it is important for each individual to work through their own pain so they will not carry it throughout life.

3. To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing. Again, the degree of necessary adjustment will vary according to the degree and kind of attachment of the bereaved to the deceased. In every case, though, the self-identity and life of the bereaved will change in some way from what it was before their loss. A healthy adjustment to this change will necessitate good choices and decisions.
4. To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. Eventually, grieving persons need to look forward and continue with their lives. They may need help to let go of the emotional energy they have been investing in the deceased, and find a more appropriate place for the deceased in their emotional lives. They should move from preoccupation to memory in their emotional relationship with the lost loved one, so they can connect with other persons by investing new energy in ongoing relationships.<sup>21</sup>

These models are generalized guides to understanding grief and the process of working through it. Because each person is unique, the grief experience and grieving process of each will be unique.

There are no absolutes in grief. There are no reactions so universal that all, or even most, people will experience them. There is only one unalterable truth: All relationships are unique.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hill, 4.

<sup>22</sup> James and Friedman, 14-15.

## Practical Support Methods

Persons caught up in the emotional maelstrom of grief are often so bewildered by the experience that they need someone to help them cope with it. The helper most likely will feel inadequate, unable to offer any meaningful consolation. In the initial phase, it may be most useful for the helper to just be there for the grieving individual, patiently understanding and allowing the individual's feelings to emerge into consciousness. When the bereaved are feeling dazed and numb, they may need practical help and support with making even small decisions.

The helper must be prepared for outpourings of anguish and anger. "Pain seems inevitable, the helper cannot bring back the person who is dead, and the bereaved person cannot gratify the helper by seeming helped." Parkes (1972)<sup>23</sup>

Bereaved persons will sometimes need special help in dealing with their loss.

Parkes (1972) suggests this is appropriate where there is

...absence of grief in a situation in which it would have been expected, episodes of panic, lasting physical symptoms, excessive anger, or the persistence of intense grief beyond the normally expected period...<sup>24</sup>

Counseling may also be indicated when other helpers have been exhausted or there are particular issues to be dealt with.

No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. C. S. Lewis (1961)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Parkes, quoted in Royal Holloway University of London, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 1.

The Center for Loss & Life Transition, founded and directed by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, is dedicated to the education and support of both the bereaved and bereavement caregivers. Dr. Wolfelt is known for his model of “Companioning” versus treating for counseling the bereaved. Wolfelt’s credo is:

We believe that those who companion the bereaved by walking with them as they journey in grief have a wondrous opportunity: to help others embrace and grow through grief, and to lead fuller, more deeply-lived lives themselves because of this important work.<sup>26</sup>

Companioning is a type of counseling relationship Wolfelt advocates.

In his own words:

- Companioning is about honoring the spirit; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
- Companioning is about curiosity; it is not about expertise.
- Companioning is about learning from others; it is not about leading.
- Companioning is about walking alongside; it is not about leading.
- Companioning is about being still; it is not about frantic movement forward.
- Companioning is about discovering the gifts of sacred silence; it is not about filling every painful moment with words.
- Companioning is about listening with the heart; it is not about analyzing with the head.
- Companioning is about bearing witness to the struggles of others; it is not about directing those struggles.

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfelt, Alan, Center for Loss & Life Transitions, *Resources for bereavement caregivers*, (<http://www.centerforloss.com/pg/Caregivers.asp>), 1.

- Companioning is about being present to another person's pain; it is not about taking away the pain.
- Companioning is about respecting disorder and confusion; it is not about imposing order and logic.
- Companioning is about going to the wilderness of the soul with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.<sup>27</sup>

Dr. Wolfert's model seems relevant to the author's investigation of the possibility of establishing a bereavement facility as a setting for the bereaved to help one another by sharing their stories and providing mutual support through the grieving process, as well as for the training of bereavement caregivers.

### **After Death Communication**

The following is a review of literature dealing with After Death Communication.

In May of 1988, Bill and Judy Guggenheim founded the After Death Communication Project, the first in-depth research into After Death Communication. The resulting book, *Hello From Heaven!*, is the first book that documents the spiritual experience that occurs when a person is contacted directly and spontaneously by a family member or friend who has died, without the use of psychics, mediums or devices of any kind. The authors interviewed 2,000 people, and collected more than 3,300 firsthand accounts from individuals who believe they have been contacted by a deceased family member or friend.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

*Hello from Heaven!* offers powerful and inspiring messages of love and hope, comfort and peace, courage and strength. The book's 353 After Death Communication accounts offer fascinating modern-day evidence of life after death; comfort and emotional support for those who are bereaved; hope for those who yearn to be reunited with a loved one who has died; courage and strength for those who have a life threatening illness; inspiration for caregivers to the elderly and the terminally ill; insight and reassurance for those who are fearful of death; and inner peace for those whose hearts and minds are awaiting this good news.<sup>28</sup>

*God's Gift of Love: After-Death Communications* (2003)<sup>29</sup>, by Christine Marie Duminiak, is an extraordinary book for the bereaved. It is filled with experiences of ordinary people who have had after death communication with loved ones. Christine Duminiak's book shows many ways deceased loved ones communicate with the living, to comfort and console family members and friends. She helps the bereaved comprehend the concept of an afterlife where their loved ones have crossed to the other side. *God's Gift of Love* is a book for anyone who has lost a loved one. It will help with the grief process and closure.

In the After Death Communication Research Foundation (ADCRF) home page<sup>30</sup>, Jody A. Long, J.D. and Jeffrey P. Long, M.D. (1999) describe their After Death Communication Research Project. With the goal of contributing to a collective

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<sup>28</sup> Guggenheim, Bill and Judy, *Hello From Heaven!* (New York: Bantam Books, 1997), from back cover.

<sup>29</sup> Duminiak, Christine Marie, *God's Gift of Love: After Death Communications* (X Libris Corporation, November 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Long, Jody A., J.D. and Jeffrey P. Long, M.D., *After Death Communication Research Foundation home page, in ADCRF Web Submission Overview*, (<http://www.adcrf.org/ADCRF%20Research.htm>, 1999).

understanding, as well as enhanced public awareness and acceptance of After Death Communication, ADCRF developed a web site to request and collect accounts of After Death Communication experiences, which would be studied and subsequently published to the site. Their definition of an After Death Communication is, “A spontaneous experience of communication with a deceased friend or family member,” which, as explained, is very much like that of Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1995).

These texts and other literature provide the basis for the following analysis of After Death Communication.

There is no death of the spiritual being you truly are, only a change, a transformation, as you release your physical body. Like an immortal butterfly emerging from its cocoon, you will be free to soar high as your wings, your consciousness, can carry you. Upon returning home, you will celebrate reunions with your loved ones who preceded you, and you shall know the meaning of joy.<sup>31</sup>

After Death Communication Research Foundation’s definition of an After Death Communication (ADC), includes the following detailed explanation:

“A spontaneous experience of communication with a deceased friend or family member.”

- “Spontaneous” means developing without apparent external cause, inducement, or plan. This definition excludes deceased entities encountered using mediums, psychics, hypnosis, or through channeling. ...
- “Experience” means something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through.

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<sup>31</sup> Guggenheim and Guggenheim, epilogue.

- “Communication” means information shared or imparted. Communication may be through any of the five physical senses, or extrasensory sharing of information, such as an awareness of the presence of the deceased.
- “Deceased” means a previously living earthly being. Generally these experiences involve deceased human friends or loved ones, but may involve a beloved pet, bird, butterfly, or other life form.
- “Friend or family member” means that the experiencer personally knew who they communicated with prior to their death. The relationship with the deceased was usually loving. This definition excludes from the ADC definition communication with angelic or other spiritual beings. ...<sup>32</sup>

After Death Communication events are sometimes thought of as hallucinations, illusions, or “all in the mind.” Today, published research has established that about 60% of the American public has experienced one or more After Death Communications.<sup>33</sup>

*American Health* published the result of a poll by the National Opinion Research Center in its January-February 1987 issue, p. 12. The findings: 42% of American adults believe they have had an After Death Communication experience and 67% of all widows believe they have had an After Death Communication experience.

Thirteen to twenty types of After Death Communication are mentioned literature reviews, including:

1. Sensing presence of the deceased
2. Hearing the actual voice of the deceased

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<sup>32</sup> Long and Long, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Drewry, Damaris, Ph.D., *Grief Counseling* (<http://www.damarisdrewry.com/griefcounseling/>),

3. Telepathically communicating with the deceased
4. Touch - from a light touch to a sexual experience
5. Visual - from faint to very visible, wearing familiar clothing
6. Taste (very rare)
7. Fragrance (the deceased's perfume or smoking tobacco)
8. Dreams – very vivid, lifelike, and memorable
9. You have an out-of-body experience and visit the deceased
10. Telephone calls from the deceased
11. Precognitive (living person has a communication with deceased individual before knowing of the death)
12. Moved objects (pictures, things that meant something to you and/or the deceased)
13. Unusual natural phenomena such as bird and rainbows
14. Unusual mechanical/electrical phenomena such as clocks starting and stopping, lights flickering
15. Receiving messages through radio-broadcast songs.<sup>34</sup>

Drewry states from her research that bereaved respondents who had After Death Communications report immediate relief, comfort, hope, love, emotional stabilization, encouragement, forgiveness and the joy of a continuing relationship. They also report completing unfinished business with the deceased and the possibility of reframing relationships with the deceased, with self and with God or the divine.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 1-2.

The experience of After Death Communication is not new, but the amount of research and writing about it since the late 1980's indicates a recent interest in exploring it through serious scholarship.

In this doctoral project, the author explores the possibility of Appalachian men and women experiencing After Death Communication from a deceased loved one or friend, and how such experiences influence, affect or contribute to their bereavement process. The author also makes note of the possible spiritual nature of After Death Communication experiences.

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<sup>35</sup> Drewry, Damaris J., Ph.D., *Purported After-Death Communication and Its Role in the Recovery of Bereaved Individuals: A Phenomenological Study* (<http://www.damsrisdrewry.com/dissertation/>, 2002), 1-2.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

The review of the literature and of the grief models in the previous chapter have given an overview of the historical and theoretical foundations of this research project, an Appalachian bereavement ministry involving storytelling and After Death Communication. Why, then, does the author explore the Bible for more foundations?

Since Judeo-Christian biblical faith is the religious foundation of the American Appalachian context in which this project is set, and the project itself is conceived as a Christian ministry, it is important to provide biblical and theological foundations for the themes central to the project. In this chapter, the author examines the themes of death and life after death; grief; and After Death Communication as they are illustrated in selected passages from the Hebrew and Christian biblical scriptures (Old and New Testaments). Theological foundations are presented for these themes, using scriptural references and stories which illustrate their development through the Old and New Testaments.

## Biblical Foundations

### Death and Life After Death in the Bible

What did the Israelites of the Bible expect to happen to them when they died?

In the First Temple period (before 587 BCE), the only hint of human existence after death is the designation of Sheol as the place of the dead, a region under the earth, a place of darkness and silence, a place of rest or “sleep,” from which there is no return. There is, during this period, no suggestion of judgment, punishment or reward after death. That of the deceased which survives death is called in Hebrew *refa*, which means “ghost” or “spirit” or “shade.” It is certainly not an enjoyable afterlife.<sup>1</sup>

This passage from Psalm 49 seems to express the common belief in this early Old Testament period that death is universal and final.

Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice that one should live on forever and never see the grave. When we look at the wise, they die; fool and dolt perish together and leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their homes forever, their dwelling places to all generations . . . Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; Sheol shall be their home.  
(Ps 49:7-11, 14)

On a more hopeful note, however, the psalmist continues:

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.  
(Ps 49:15)

In a rare departure from the usual Old Testament view of the finality of death, reflected in the verses quoted just above, this verse seems to move in the direction of a hope for life

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<sup>1</sup> Segal, Alan F., *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 135-136, 142-143.

with God beyond death. While not yet a belief in resurrection, this hope is a very early movement in the direction of Paul's affirmation "that neither death, nor life . . . nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:38-39).

Not until the Second Temple period (515 BCE—70 CE), however, is there any clear idea of a meaningful life after death among the Israelites of the Kingdom of Judah, who returned from the Babylonian captivity and are now called the Jews. The first hints of resurrection in the Hebrew scriptures occur in "Isaiah's Apocalypse": Isaiah 24-27:

He will swallow up death forever, and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.  
(Is 25:8)

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.  
(Is 26:19)

In these passages, Isaiah is referring to peoples or nations, especially the conquered nation of Israel and the threatened nation of Judah, which the Lord will restore after their punishment. This is to give the people of Israel hope that they will be brought back to life as a people, rather than as individual persons. This is clearly the case with the graphic resurrection images of Ezekiel 37 (the restoration of the army from their dry, scattered bones), where the metaphorical intention of the vision to refer to national regeneration is made explicit:

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.  
Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you

up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. . . . I will put my spirit (breath) within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act.”  
(Ez 37:10-12, 14).

Such metaphorical resurrection language prepares the way for, finally, the first literal reference to resurrection in the Hebrew scriptures, Daniel 12:1-2:

At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

This scripture, from the Maccabean period (168-165 BCE), is one of the latest to be included in the Hebrew Bible.

This concept of life after death, with reference to resurrection of the body, arrived at late in the Old Testament period, is a far cry from the shadowy “life” of the shades in Sheol typical of the earlier Old Testament period. This later concept, along with the Greek idea of the immortality of the soul, leads directly to the ideas of death and life after death found in the New Testament. In the period between the Old and New Testaments, two religious groups arose among the Jews: the Pharisees, including Saul (Paul), who affirmed the resurrection; and the Sadducees, who denied it.

In the New Testament/Christian scriptures resurrection is crucial, because the heart of the Christian gospel (good news) message is that after his death, Jesus was raised (resurrected) to new life, and has made this resurrection available to all who have faith in him.

Paul was the first Christian author to address questions regarding resurrection. In 1 Thes 4:13-18 he answered concerns about what would happen to Christians who died before Jesus (the Lord) came back, as he was expected to do very soon. Paul writes:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself ... will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

(1 Thes 4:14-17)

Paul's most complete discussion of resurrection is found in 1 Cor 15. The heart of Paul's presentation deals with the nature of the resurrection body. Here he distinguishes between the physical body and the spiritual body (1 Cor 15:42-44). The resurrection will involve a mysterious transformation from mortality to immortality.

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. ... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ... then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'

(1 Cor 15:50-55)

### Grief in the Bible

Grief is a theme that runs through the Bible. When persons experience great loss, especially the death of a loved one, friend, or person of importance to them, or great

disappointment, they have strong emotional feelings of grief and express these feelings in outward actions of mourning.

The Bible is full of stories of such grieving. The stories about the Hebrew patriarchs, from Abraham through Moses, contain many accounts of grief, including mourning the death of loved ones by families and mourning the death of leaders by the people.

Among his many experiences of grief and mourning, King David mourned the deaths of two of his sons. When his infant son by Bathsheba became ill, David fasted and lay on the ground and wept (as if in mourning) before the child died. His house staff urged him to get up and eat, but he would not do it. When the child finally died, his servants were afraid to tell David, fearing that he might be so grief-stricken that he would harm himself, or perhaps harm them. But when he realized the child was dead, he got up, washed, dressed, worshipped and ate, saying, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.’ But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” (2 Sam 12:13-23).

David’s greatest grief seems to have been for his renegade son, Absalom, killed by Joab and his armor-bearers as an enemy of David. David’s extreme grief for his son was criticized by Joab because it was demoralizing his victorious troops (2 Sam 18-19:8).

Where is God during such times of grief for loved ones? These stories are used to support the research and to describe the deep emotional feelings one can have on learning of the death of a loved one. Her conviction is that God is with the bereaved and with those who care for them, from the beginning and throughout their grief.

In the New Testament, the Christian hope influences the quality of grief: “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” (1 Thes 4:13). In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Mt 5:4).

The verse Jn 11:19, “. . . many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother,” is the primary biblical foundation for the model of caring for the bereaved developed in this project. It is an example of loved ones grieving for a dead family member, and illustrates the comfort that their friends and Jesus and his disciples give to the grieving family. Jesus, after hearing of his friend Lazarus’ illness from Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha, and knowing Lazarus had died, took his disciples back to Bethany, near Jerusalem. When Jesus saw the weeping of Lazarus’ loved ones and the friends who had gathered to console them, he was soon weeping himself (Jn 11:33-36). In this unselfish act of joining them in their grief, Jesus ratified grief as a proper and necessary response to the loss of a loved one.

This example of grief and comfort from Jn 11:19 and the whole story in which this verse is found (Jn 11:1-44) shows the appropriateness of such acts of mourning as gathering and weeping together, both then and now, as expressions of compassionate love, comfort and caring for the bereaved.

Persons grieve when they know from within that something has gone wrong with their lives, families or the world. Persons are created for wholeness with God, and when they experience loss, brokenness, separation and disruption of their lives, they are lost. How is God present and active when grieving persons feel most alone and forgotten? God is with the bereaved in the presence of those who love and care for them. Sharing the

hope of restoration, the acceptance of peace from God, and the recognition of God's blessings that remain after suffering loss are reasons, both in Jesus' time and today, why persons come together as God's loving family to comfort the bereaved.

### After Death Communication in the Bible

An interesting aspect of some individuals' grieving is communication with the dead. There are not many biblical instances of this experience, because it was so strongly forbidden, as a practice of the pagan Canaanites:

When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the abhorrent practices of those nations. No one shall be found among you who . . . consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead.  
(Dt 18:9-11)

The few instances cited, along with such strong prohibitions, however, indicate that communication with the dead did take place. The most obvious example, from 1 Samuel, is Saul's consulting the medium at Endor to communicate with the deceased Samuel (1 Sm 28:3-25).

When Saul, terrified at the sight of the enemy army, sought a word from God, he got no answer. So he sought out a medium to "bring up" the deceased Samuel, though Saul himself had expelled mediums from the land (1 Sm 28:3, 9) because their use was prohibited in the Law of God, as noted above. When the medium at Endor, promised by Saul that she would not be punished, brought Samuel up, the communication Saul received in answer to his inquiry was bad news. Samuel confirmed his own prophesy, that Saul had been rejected by God, replaced as king, and further revealed that Saul's army would be defeated and he and his sons would be with Samuel (dead) the next day (1

Sm 28:8-19). This story indicates a belief that communication with the dead is possible, and, though prohibited, was practiced.

Within Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus (not the brother of Mary and Martha) in the book of Luke (Lk 16:19-31), there is communication between people who are dead (the rich man and Father Abraham). Jesus' point is that the living do not need a message from the dead. When the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his (living) brothers, so they will not join him in torment, saying, ". . . if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent," Jesus has Abraham reply, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." This passage does confirm a belief in the possibility that the dead can communicate with the living.

In the accounts of the Transfiguration (Mt 17:1-9; Mk 9:1-8; Lk 9:27-36) Jesus, in a vision witnessed by three disciples, speaks with Moses and Elijah, who were long dead and/or departed.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of the faithful departed ancestors as a great cloud of witnesses surrounding the living (Heb 12:1), whose example encourages the living to live by faith, "sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" as their ancestors did (Heb 11:1 New International Version). The cloud of witnesses is surrounding living Christians while they "run the race," as partisan spectators cheering them on to victory. Sensing the communication of their presence and encouragement helps the living to "finish the race; keep the faith," as set forth in 2 Tm 4:7b. In a sense, the ancestors "still speak" through the example of their faith (Heb 11:4). Knowing that the ancestors endured by faith helps the living to persevere. Though the ancestors finished their course by faith,

they have not yet received what was promised (Heb 11:39). They are still waiting because “God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.” (Heb 11:40 NIV). The “something better,” of course, is Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2a), to whom the living look, not only for help while running the race, but also for the prize:

“. . . reserved for me, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.  
(2 Tim 4:8)

While they were waiting, “the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does.” (1 Pt 4:6). So the faithful, both living and dead together, are assured of new and everlasting life at the day of Jesus’ appearing.

Thus the Bible, while not encouraging persons to seek communication with the dead, does reveal a belief that such communication could occur. A belief that the deceased can communicate with their living loved ones encourages the hope that they are alive in a spiritual realm where they can be rejoined for eternity. This hope can be a great comfort to those grieving the death of loved ones.

### **Theological Foundations**

How does theology help to make a connection between the biblical foundations and this research project?

The thesis of this project is that persons who are grieving the death of loved ones may find comfort, healing and joy through telling their grief stories, or “unveiling the

truth.” These stories may include accounts of experiences of After Death Communication from deceased loved ones.

Theology grounds the concerns of this project in an understanding of how they are related to the nature and activity of God as revealed in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. This understanding is explored through the research by involving systematic, practical and process theologies. This approach provides a solid theological foundation for a ministry of love and care for one another.

How does systematic theology work within this project? Briefly defined, systematic theology, drawing from biblical sources, develops a picture of God’s nature and activities, from a perspective of faith.

Biblical themes, as cited in the previous section, are utilized to develop a theological understanding of God as the creator of life and death; the redeemer of those who are living and dead, who restores their eternal lives; and who brings the hope for life after death, resurrection, and God’s eternal realm of peace and joy. God is also understood as the loving sustainer of all creation, including God’s loving family, through the present period of mortal life, waiting for the promised new creation.

This theological foundation draws on biblical and systematic understandings of God as loving, caring, comforting and sustaining, especially in “seasons of distress and grief.” This view of God, particularly as embodied in the ministry of Jesus noted in the biblical foundations above, provides a model for the church’s pastoral grief ministry, moving into the area of practical theology.

Practical theology relates to the practice of the church’s ministries in the world today. It includes identifying the questions and concerns to which the church must

respond, suggesting practices that embody theologically appropriate responses to those questions and concerns, and shaping those practices so they will be appropriate to the contexts in which they will be carried out. The areas of ministry informed by practical theology include: the nurture of congregations (Christian education, fellowship, pastoral care), the mission of the church in the world, the transmission of the Christian message (evangel) to the contemporary world, the church's worship of God, spiritual formation and matters of social justice (ethics and advocacy).

The ministry this project entails, helping the bereaved find hope and healing through telling their grief stories to one another, is informed by the area of practical theology dealing with pastoral care and engagement of the congregation in mutual and corporate care, especially as these apply to comfort and grief work on occasions of loss/death and bereavement.

Process theology takes the position that an understanding of God and God's activity in creation and in human lives and history is always "in process" and never final or complete. It is a theology of change. God changes, and creates a changing world.

Tyron L. Inbody, in *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil*, states that in process theology,

God originates or creates the world in the sense that every event in every moment comes to be by God's "willing" or "calling" the event into existence by offering possibilities, which are the means through which God exercises divine guidance of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Human understanding of God changes and develops, too. Process theology affirms the idea that humanity is always being moved toward growth in knowledge and understanding. The use of process theology in this research allows this project freedom to

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<sup>2</sup> Inbody, Tyron L., *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 150.

move forward in new understandings beyond traditional theology, especially in the area of After Death Communication.

### Theology of Grief

What does God have to do with grief?

The theological understanding of humankind as not only creatures but as children of God points up the ambiguity of humans as finite, subject to the vulnerabilities of earthly life, including suffering, pain, separation, loss and death. Yet, humans are also able to see beyond this finitude, and hope for ultimate rebirth, reunion and peaceful resolution and restoration. Humans, thus, have the capacity, by the grace of God, to accept all these aspects of finitude as natural and necessary parts of the present order of God's creation. Therefore, the sorrow and grief that humans experience when such vulnerabilities occur are natural, and to be expected, accepted and worked through.

The inevitability of grief and the appropriateness of grieving are consequences of human love for the world God has made. Because God has made us people of passion with needs for loving and being loved, it is understandable that we are sad when we lose what we have loved. ... the passion and the will to love and be loved are part of the *imago Dei* in the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. God is not passionless; God loves (us) and suffers (with us).<sup>3</sup> (added)

The possibility of God's suffering (passion) has been disputed since the early church fathers. This question is explored by Andrew Sung Park in *The Wounded Heart of God* (1993). Drawing on Anselm, Luther, Kitamori and Moltmann, Park supports the view that God does suffer for and with humanity, especially manifest in the life and death of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> In the New Testament and throughout much Christian biblical interpretation,

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<sup>3</sup> Mitchell and Anderson, 164.

Jesus, as God's Messiah (Christ), is identified with God's Suffering Servant in the Book of Isaiah. Described as wounded, afflicted and bruised for our healing (Is 53:5), he is called, "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3b New King James Version). "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (Is 53:4a NKJV).

The story of Jesus joining Lazarus' family in their grief shows that divine grief is evidence of divine love. "Jesus began to weep." "See how he loved him!" (Jn 11:35, 36) The author believes Jesus' weeping with them also gave Lazarus' family and friends ease in their sorrow and showed his approval of their grief.

### Theology of Care/Comfort

What does God have to do with care/comfort?

The compassionate God, portrayed in the Bible as grieved and grieving for human suffering, and especially for the suffering and death of the divine Son, Jesus, not only comforts and heals persons by sharing their suffering and grief, but also models for them and empowers in them the compassionate sharing of one another's suffering and grief, by which they comfort and heal one another (Gal 6:2).

Just as God loves persons, and in doing so calls and empowers persons to love one another (1 Jn 4:11), so "... the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God," (2 Cor 1:3c-4 NIV).

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<sup>4</sup> Park, Andrew Sung, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 111-112.

Compassionately comforting those who are grieving the death of loved ones, in the context of this project, includes sympathetically inviting, eliciting and listening to their grief stories.

### Theology of Storytelling

Why does storytelling bring comfort, and what does God have to do with it?

There is power in words, especially in spoken words. The revelation of God's nature and God's actions occurs through the words of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, surely spoken before they were written. And that revelation is of God who creates and acts by God's power-full Word. Those scriptures are composed much more of stories than of doctrinal propositions. Those stories—from the stories of God choosing and guiding the history of a people; through the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection; his own parables; and the stories of Jesus' disciples becoming, building and leading a new people of God, the church—have the power to bring new generations to faith in God, and to guide, encourage, comfort and enable these new generations in their mission. This is especially true in times of distress and grief, as experienced by the twelve respondents in this research.

In the same way, the stories God's people tell and hear today are able to help them encourage and comfort one another. As grieving persons “unveil the truth” by telling their stories, they are subsequently freed from the burden of grief, finding relief, joy and healing through sharing their experiences with others.

## Theology of After Death Communication

Sometimes, grief stories include accounts of deceased loved ones communicating with their grieving survivors. What do these stories mean, and what does God have to do with them?

If these stories recount “real” events that have occurred, then they mean that the deceased are somehow “alive,” conscious, aware of the grief of their surviving loved ones and able to communicate their love, comfort and encouragement to the grieving. These stories also mean, for those who believe God is responsible for the new life of those who have died, that God allows, encourages or causes such communication to take place. The biblical foundations support belief in the possibility of After Death Communication. Why, then, does God appear to have discouraged or absolutely prohibited such communication?

First, a distinction should be made between communication sought by the living with the dead by means of mediums, psychics or necromancers, and spontaneous communication of the dead with the living.

Communication by necromancy, defined as the practice of supposedly communicating with the spirits of the dead in order to predict the future, is prohibited in the Old Testament. The reason given for this prohibition is that necromancy was practiced by the Canaanites, who worshipped other gods. The reasoning followed that if God’s people practiced necromancy, they would also be tempted to worship those other gods instead of worshipping God alone, hence committing idolatry. Another reason for

the prohibition is that the practice of necromancy, instead of trusting God to provide information by revelation or prophesy, was seeking information by human activity such as invoking spells, divinations and the practice of magic.

The other type of contact with the deceased, spontaneous communication of the dead with the living, seems to be an acceptable way the dead could be sent, like angels, to bring warning, instruction, hope or comfort to the living. This is the type of After Death Communication considered in this project. The author and ten respondents experienced this type of spontaneous communication, and it brought them comfort, hope and peace in their time of grief.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

What is it like losing someone or something dear to you? The grief felt when such loss occurs, and how it can be a healing experience through a ministry of caring support, are the focus of this doctoral project.

There is a great depth of this area of ministry, and narrowing down the many possibilities and avenues for research took time. It took months to decide how the study would be conducted and how many diverse participants would take part.

To get started, one of many possible project designs had to be developed. This was a major decision, complicated in part because every time a decision was made about how to conduct the study, more ideas would come to mind, starting the process of planning over again.

The original project proposal, *Women Unveiling the Truth Brings Joy in the Morning*, envisioned a ministry to Appalachian women who were experiencing grief because of a broad range of losses, including death of a loved one; loss of employment/ economic security; losses associated with personal abuse, racism, sexism and classism; and the effects of retirement and aging. The original project's goal was to empower,

encourage and affirm women who are grieving, enabling them to find wholeness or to become whole.

The initial plan was to start with a women's support group, comprised of five to eight women from the local area. These women would unveil their dark secrets of loss through shared prayer, storytelling, writing, study groups and responses to questionnaires. After six weeks of bonding and support, this group would demonstrate unfailing love and truth by bringing into the group another woman dealing with loss and grief to help her also to find healing and wholeness.

In actuality, the implementation of this plan failed because of adverse weather conditions. A four to six week schedule had been established for a weekly support group to be held at a church, to serve women who were grieving the loss of a loved one. The plan also included a two-day retreat with all participants at a beautiful location in West Virginia near Interstate 64.

Calls were made to potential participants, surveying the need for a bereavement support group. The women contacted were asked whether they would be interested in attending a weekly bereavement support group for an hour to an hour and thirty minutes, where they would have Bible study, reading scriptures related to grief, and also share personal experiences of grieving with each other. The weekly support group was to be a time of sharing stories and experiences with other bereaved individuals, in hopes of beginning to heal the pain of darkness and looking forward to the days of joy to come into their lives. The ladies contacted agreed that a church bereavement support group of five to eight women would be helpful, and seven women agreed to participate. However,

after two months of failed attempts, trying to get all seven women together weekly for four to six weeks turned out to be unsuccessful, mostly due to the winter weather.

In the meantime, one early winter morning, the author was attending a six-hour workshop on forgiveness. During lunch she met one of her clinical pastoral education (CPE) professors and shared ideas about her doctoral project with him. After about a month she thought about what was said during their conversation. Her CPE professor, a D.Min. graduate, suggested including at least one man into the equation. After considering this wise idea, and realizing men also suffer loss and experience grief, she concurred, and decided to include men in her project.

After the setback from the original project design, the research was ultimately carried out utilizing a phenomenological study involving twelve respondents. The respondents would tell stories about their experience of grief after the death of a loved one and respond to a phone survey consisting of ten questions. The survey questions addressed the respondents' experiences of After Death Communication as well as their opinions about the utility of a community bereavement facility. The After Death Communication component was added to the model for research because of the author's own experience and similar experiences expressed in the stories of some of the respondents.

### **Methodology**

A qualitative research method has been employed for this doctoral project. Qualitative research involves a process of understanding a social or human area of concern by building a comprehensive, holistic narrative account, reporting detailed views

of respondents conducted in a natural setting. In contrast, quantitative research is based on testing a theory composed of variables, often in controlled settings, measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures, to determine whether the theory holds true.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenological method was chosen for this project over other types of qualitative research such as case study, ethnographic or grounded theory, because it is “the interpretive study of human experience. The aim is to examine and clarify human situations, events, meaning, and experiences”<sup>2</sup> of everyday life. Both first-person phenomenological research and existential-phenomenological research methodologies are utilized within this project.

In first-person phenomenological research, the researcher uses her or his own firsthand experience to examine phenomena and draw conclusions. In this project, the phenomenological approach was employed to describe the author’s personal grief experiences, and to draw from those experiences an understanding of bereavement and its characteristics. The author offers her own lifeworld experiences through storytelling. These experiences are shared with the twelve respondents as they also share their stories, and in this exchange the worlds of others are involved. This practice leads into the existential-phenomenological research methodology, which is based on “the specific experiences of specific individuals and groups involved in actual situations and places.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Creswell, John W., *Research Design: Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> Seamon, David, *Phenomenology, Place, Environment, and Architecture: A Review of the Literature*, in *Environmental & Architectural Phenomenology Newsletter*, David Seamon, ed., Architecture Department, Kansas State University (<http://www.arch.ksu.edu/seamon>), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. (from von Eckartsberg), 14.

The four steps in existential-phenomenological research are:

1. Identifying the phenomenon which the researcher is investigating;
2. Gathering descriptive accounts from respondents of their experience of the phenomenon
3. Studying the respondents' accounts to identify any underlying commonalities and patterns; and
4. Presenting the findings, both to the respondents (debriefing in ordinary language) and to fellow researchers (in a scholarly presentation).<sup>4</sup>

A vital aspect of phenomenological research is the researcher's own direct experience of the phenomenon and his or her personal involvement with the respondents as they recount their experiences. ". . . the central instrument of deciphering the phenomenon is the *phenomenological researcher herself*. . . the researcher as human instrument is the heart of phenomenological method . . .".<sup>5</sup>

Though there is some use of quantitative method (in the tabulation of the phone survey responses), ethnographic (in the description of the Appalachian context) and case study (in some of the respondents' and associate's narrative accounts), the characteristics of phenomenological research, first-person and existential, make it the ideal method for this project.

Following this method, stories of respondents' experiences of grief have been collected and analyzed. In addition, this methodology was utilized in to conduct phone interviews inquiring about the respondents' experiences of After Death Communication, and how sharing their stories of grief could aid in the resolution of their bereavement.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 11-12.

### Contextual and Professional Associates' Evaluations

One contextual associate and one professional associate, both females, reviewed the context and said they found the research to be valid and rewarding. Through their own experience, they found that storytelling is a way for the bereaved to share their grief. By doing so it is hoped that the bereaved will come together for healing their pain of loss through the voices of others.

The contextual associate's response to the project (in part):

I had the privilege to take part in the Grief Project offered by Elizabeth Allen-Villinger. This project has been most helpful to me in that I personally have carried many feelings within for over 40 years. Being born into the generation of women who were still considered to be the property of men, I kept all these feeling [sic] to myself. My earliest memories of abuse go back as early as my fifth birthday. Being raised in a dysfunctional and abusive family, I learned very early on that this was a man's world and women were to mind. . . .

The more I kept allowing myself to be hurt by men, the more I grieved. Grieve [sic] is only a part of someone who has experienced sexual, verbal, emotional and physical abuse. For many years now, I have counseled to overcome my pain and scarring but unlike a physical ailment where you can see the actual affliction, emotional torment and guilt are hidden from the naked eye allowing us who are suffering to function normally on the outside while the malignancy of grief continues to eat away at us on the inside.

I believe this program to be crucial in the survival of grieving victims and has been long overdo [sic]. Grief and guilt are common emotions that serve to keep us from fully enjoying the life God has given us. Although, this in part remains a man's world, I believe we as women are more likely survive our past through programs like this. I personally can attest to my healing and survival, both physically and emotionally because now there is somewhere to go, someone to listen to us, someone to help us.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DOING THE RESEARCH**

#### **Collection of Data**

As research begun on the experience of grief felt by Appalachian people after the death of a loved one, potential research respondents were identified. A list of twelve respondents was developed, nine females and three males. Respondents were selected by acquaintance with the researcher over a period of at least two years, utilizing a personal relationship to allow the respondents to speak freely and write their stories from the heart. Personal phone calls were made asking selected individuals to participate in a research project on personal grief. In addition, a letter was sent to each prospective respondent, consisting of a brief definition of grief and two questions to be considered for telling their stories about grief and loss. Permission forms were included with the letters, allowing for the use of the oral and written stories to be shared in this project. Self-addressed envelopes, letters and permission forms were sent to respondents with a requested return date of April 9, 2005 [see Appendices A and B].

The written stories and permission forms were slow in coming. Some individuals were contacted by phone a second time to confirm their participation in the project. Two of the original respondents did not follow through with stories. They were replaced by two others, a female and a male.

Both oral and written stories were collected from the twelve respondents, to be examined as data in this study, and also as a means for them to grow and heal in the bereavement process. In these stories, the respondents shared their incredible experiences of grief after the death of a loved one or the loss of someone or something dear to their heart. Eleven written stories were submitted by the respondents; nine stories written by women and two stories written by men.

There were six face-to-face interviews; five with women and one with a man. During the interviews, each person was asked to describe a personal experience of grief for the loss of a loved one or something valued. The author transcribed the oral stories as they were told. Names have been changed to protect the respondents' anonymity. The five women talked freely about their grief after the loss of a loved one. The women had also written more stories. The men shared less in writing, but their words were powerful. During both the oral and written stories, the respondents reached a point in the storytelling where they described the experience as a time of release and closure.

To collect further data, a ten question survey was conducted by phone. Some questions explored respondents' attitudes regarding After Death Communication and the experience of this phenomenon, while other questions addressed opinions about the utility of a possible community bereavement facility. Responses to the phone survey were transcribed. Eleven respondents answered the survey over the phone. One respondent, because of difficulty hearing, was administered the survey in person. All respondents' answers were tape recorded by the researcher. Their responses were then tabulated. Of the ten survey questions, five used "yes, no, uncertain and no answer" as responses; one used "females and males;" one asked the respondents to provide an answer in their own

words; one used “Church building, Community center and Other\_\_\_\_\_”. Two questions listed ten types of After Death Communication from which to choose the appropriate type(s).

### **Selected Data**

Full text of all written and transcribed stories can be found in Appendix C.

Sandy, a 40-year-old African-American woman from Virginia, tells her story of losing her mother [as recorded and transcribed]:

When I was about six or seven years old, I used to dream about my mother's death. I really did not understand it. I would see her in a bed with me, crying and hearing her called [sic] my name. I would go to her, she said, “Sandy, I love you but I am going home.” I saw her look up and with a smile on her face as she closed her eyes.

I did not let anyone touch her. Her body was so still. I watched her body sleep. In the bed I was with her and would not let anyone take her from me.

Then about three years before she died, I just watched her body get smaller and smaller but she would never give up. She did whatever had to be done or go wherever she had to go.

But watching her breathe was hard. It looked like it hurt her so bad. Like her body was going inside out. Me and my cousins [sic] would go back and forth to the hospital with her, not knowing if she was coming back home. This was not my first time with death. I never did think God was going to take her away from me.

We had our ups and downs but I did love her, I felt in my heart the day my uncle died. When we told my mother, she was in the hospital, she did not cry. My mother went up to the casket, put her hand on his face and said, “I will see ya soon.” She got up from where we was [sic] sitting and said, “I have to talk to my brother.”

On the day before my mother died, she said, “I have to go see my brother, it could be the last time I see him.” My uncle, her other brother, he lived in West Virginia. My cousin took her to see him.

Watching my mother put on her lipstick and fix her face up, she said, "Sandy, watch the house; I'll see you later." They came back that morning about one in the morning. I was sleeping, and when I woke up it was 7:30 in the morning. I called her every morning to see how she was.

Something woke me up. I heard a voice saying, "Sandy, call your mom." I was sick to my stomach. When I called her I could hardly hear her. I said, "Mom are you ok?" She said, "No. I can hardly breathe." I said, "Do you want me to take you to the hospital?" She always wants me to take her when she gets sick. This time was so different. She said, "No. Call the rescue squad." So I did. I got in the car and got up there as quick as I could. When I got there, the door was open. I came in my mother's bedroom, and saw her on the bed. The room was hot. Her bed had not been slept in. She had no air all night. The machine that helped her breathe at night had been on since she got there.

I never did see her face, and she never talked to me. The rescue ambulance came and got her ready to take to the hospital. When they put her on the stretcher, she called my name and said, "Sandy, I love you." Then when I got to the hospital, the ER people said she had her first heart attack at home. They were trying to get her stable. The doctor came out and said, "We have to put a tube in so she can breathe."

... My mother lifted her head and turned toward me, looking right into my eyes. Then she put her head back down. We listened for two hours to the way she was breathing. They called it the death rattle, and she was gone. I saw my mother through three stages of death. I would never take anything from that. God made sure I was there with her.

... So I know a person does need someone with them when they are leaving this place.

Death is peaceful. ... I used to be afraid of death; you learn from it, and today I understand it better, just watching that smiling face and body at peace.

Mae, a middle-aged Caucasian woman who has had much grief in her life, shared the following story of a long period of grieving for her mother, and how it was finally eased by an After Death Communication experience.

It has been several years since my mother's passing. August 1995, to be exact. As for my grief, that actually started in 1987 when my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and placed in a nursing facility . . . Before my mother lost all consciousness, I remember one morning we were sitting together, and her mind was especially clear, [and] she said those words that I had for so long waited to hear. She really did love me. Somehow, I felt as though I had gotten that chance back, if only for a short while, to become close to her. The Lord finally took her home. I remember being thankful for his mercy and for an end to her suffering, both mentally and physically, but I still wasn't sure about her salvation. I still wasn't sure she was in heaven. So I continued to pray for a sign from her or God to let me know she was okay. About three weeks later in the middle of the night, I got a sign assuring me she indeed is in heaven. Remember, how I said I had prayed about being a shining light to everyone, well my sign came in the form of a nightlight that was in my bedroom but never turned on. I had gotten [up] around 3am to go to the bathroom and when I returned to my bedroom, the room was completely illuminated from that small night light. At first I wondered who had turned on the light but a still small voice soon told me. Do I still grieve? Some, but not as much as I did when I knew she was trapped inside a body and a mind she no longer had control of.

The author's own experiences of grief are also included as data in this first-person phenomenological research.

Years ago, who would have known that my first grief experience of a loved one would be the beginning of my passion to care for others. I remember my first encounter with grief. I was in grade school, and I must have been nine or ten at the time. The school nurse called me out of class to go to the hospital and stay with my sister while mother went home to rest for a few hours. Mother, a caring and loving mother, stayed at the hospital for days and nights while my sixteen-month old sister struggled with pneumonia.

Many times, Mother walked several miles to be near her baby girl, who had been slow in developing; she couldn't walk at her age. I remember during the summer months Mother would take my sister outside and lay her down on a beautiful blanket on the grass. We would play and take care of her while Mother prepared lunch. My sister was beautiful, with brown curly hair and big beautiful brown eyes. Her skin was smooth, like fine milk chocolate. I remember Mother and Father telling us kids that our baby sister had an

enlarged heart. I remember her chest in the middle of her body was shaped like a small football hat.

The nurse had brought me to the hospital before Mother left for home. Many times Mother would walk home from the hospital, but that day the same nurse who had brought me to the hospital drove Mother home. The nurse and staff did not let Mother know that her baby was dying. I thought then as a child, and I think now as an adult, that the hospital staff thought Mother could not handle the death of her youngest child.

As I waited in the hospital room with my baby sister, her little body moved several times under the oxygen tent. I thought she was getting better. I remember thinking, "She is going to be OK." There was a sense of joy and peace in the room. My sister is going to be better and she will go home. In reality she was going home; within a moment she passed away from this earthly place. I stood there, helpless and confused. Mother returned a few minutes after my little sister had died in the hospital bed.

This was my first experience with death and grief. I remember becoming upset with the hospital nurses because they let my sister die. I felt helpless because there was nothing I or anyone else could do to save my sister from death. I could only look at her tiny body and shed tears. I felt empty inside, and loss, like a huge rock, fell on my chest and crushed it into tiny pieces scattered on the bare ground. A child taking on the burdens of the moment, as grief begins to set into a body of motionless flesh. I wanted to blame someone for the pain I felt deep down inside.

The question is asked, "Do children really grieve?" "Yes. Grief is an expression of love. Mourning is an appropriate emotion for people of all ages. Children are no strangers to unhappy feeling--they know what it means to feel mad, sad, guilty, lonely, and afraid."<sup>1</sup> As a child, when Mother and Father told our family about the death of our sister, the unhappy feeling came back after the experience at the hospital. I felt mad, sad, guilty, lonely and afraid.

Today I believe our brokenness as children and as adults helps to strengthen and empower us as individuals to find our way in this world. James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must

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<sup>1</sup> Grollman, Earl A., ed., *Bereaved Children and Teens: A Support Guide for Parents and Professionals* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 9.

finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

No one can take away the pain and hurt that come from the death of a loved one. To have someone who can listen, and to know there is “a source outside ourselves for the strength and courage we would need to survive life’s tragedies and life’s unfairness”<sup>2</sup> give hope and peace to endure the suffering of loss and grief.

It would take years of grieving, becoming a pastor, chaplain and friend in “Almost Heaven,” West Virginia, among Appalachian people of unusual strength, to recognize my calling, which is to help the bereaved understand the process of grief and to let them know what they are going through—the crying, sleepless nights, confusion, thinking they have lost their mind when they hear voices or see the figure or image of a deceased loved one—is normal.

Like the majority of phone survey respondents, the researcher believes in the reality of After Death Communication from a loved one, because of her own experience after her father’s death.

My father died before I finished college, a few days before Fathers’ Day in June. His death left my mind in a state of incompleteness. The second semester of school had ended in May, and I went home to be with my family. My father died of a stroke in the same hospital where my baby sister died of pneumonia. I helped Mother with Father’s funeral arrangements and comforted my family during this time of grief. I appeared to be okay during the funeral service and after we laid my father’s body to rest.

I went back to college, but my thoughts were about my loss. For days, all I could think about were my love for Father and his love for me. One night in my room I broke down and cried—my father is dead; no more hugs, no more conversations with him. I cried with a loud voice, what would I do without my father in my life? I cried until I felt myself getting sick, because of all my emotions. I prayed that night, “Oh, God, help! Help me, Lord.” Tears ran down my face like a river that night. I could not stop crying and calling out my father’s name. After a while I fell into a deep trance, and woke up with my father’s spirit comforting me with loving and caring words, “It is alright, Princess. I am with you and my spirit

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<sup>2</sup> Kushner, Harold S., *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 133.

will always be near you. Wherever you may go, I will be there with you.”

This spiritual experience with my father helped me to face reality and to move forward in my spiritual journey. Praise God for the unforeseen moments with my father. I will remember that night when I opened my eyes and saw Father in my room near me with a smile on his face. I knew I would be fine, for I felt peace around me and within me like a peaceful and gentle river flowing downstream, washing away my pain and sorrow. That night I experienced peace and understanding from God.

I didn't know at the time this experience was called After Death Communication. I just called it my experience with my deceased father.

### **Personal Biases**

The author's perceptions of grief for a deceased loved one, and her understanding of death and dying, reflected in this project, have been shaped by these personal experiences of loss and grief. For twenty-eight years she has been a minister, serving as the pastor of several churches, as chaplain for three hospitals at different times and as a hospice counselor and coordinator. Through these roles, working with bereaved family members and friends and comforting the dying, she has developed an understanding of the context and nature of death and grief from personal experience. This understanding enhances her awareness and knowledge of, and sensitivity to many of the challenges, issues and decisions encountered as a minister, and has assisted her in working with the respondents in this doctoral project. She brings to this research the perspective of both a bereaved family member and a bereavement caregiver.

Acknowledging that her previous personal experiences as well as her witnessing and working closely with the bereaved may enhance her research, the author is also

aware that because of them she brings certain biases to this study. For instance, she believes After Death Communication is really what it seems to be, but she knows its effect on others depends on how they perceive it. The researcher also believes that sharing grief stories can facilitate bereavement, but she has tried to honestly reflect the respondents' experiences as they related them.

The author realizes her biases may influence the way she understands the data she has collected, and how she has interpreted them. Every effort has been made to ensure objectivity, credibility and truthfulness.

### **Analysis of Data Collected**

The letter soliciting the respondents' personal stories of loss and grief referred to several other losses in addition to the death of a loved one that could be the occasions for grief. The focus of this project has since been narrowed to grief occasioned by the loss of a loved one. The letter also suggested that the respondents consider Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' five stages of grief as they write their grief stories. Subsequent research has revealed from the literature that Kubler-Ross' five stages, which she applied to the grieving process of the dying, do not necessarily apply to grief occasioned by other losses, including the death of a loved one.<sup>3</sup> Hence, in the analysis of the data from these stories, Kubler-Ross' five stages were not necessarily applied.

In the stories they shared, most of the respondents grieving the death of a loved one reported experiencing two or more of the following grief response themes:

- Overwhelming, uncontrollable need to cry

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<sup>3</sup> James and Friedman, 11-12; Mitchell and Anderson, 59-60.

- Feeling of sadness, emptiness
- Difficulty concentrating, wandering
- Feeling numbness and shock
- Exhaustion and lack of energy
- Feeling guilt
- Sensing the presence of the deceased
- Receiving a sign from the deceased
- Receiving a warning from the deceased
- Dreams of the deceased
- Feeling a touch
- Hearing a voice
- Completing unfinished business with the deceased
- Feeling at peace
- Feeling relief, comfort and love

Through the process of writing or telling their stories, several of the respondents reported they had experienced closure, release or comfort, or had been helped toward a resolution of their grief.

As these twelve respondents from Appalachia shared their experiences orally and in writing, the author was reminded by their experiences that the death of a loved one produces emotions that are flowing streams of memories; John W. James and Russell Friedman described this grief in their book, *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, as “the

feeling of reaching out for someone who has always been there, only to find that when we need them one more time, they are no longer there.”<sup>4</sup>

A new component of grieving, the experience of After Death Communication, was identified during the course of analyzing the respondents’ stories. This variable was identified in two of the respondents’ written stories and four oral stories during personal interviews. After Death Communication is defined differently by the respondents; as part of the grieving process, subjects experienced communication from their departed loved ones in various manifestations: a dream, a presence, a touch, a voice, a warning of danger, a warm feeling through the body of the griever, the spirit of the dead returning to comfort the grieved one and to support closure. The study revealed that after the experience of After Death Communication with their loved one, there was a transformation of understanding and a new birth of energy to move forward and to enjoy life on earth.

One respondent writes:

It was like a black cloud covered my whole being when I heard the words, John is dead. I could not response [sic], my body and mind were frozen and I became like a big cube of ice. I remember trying to move my body but only tears felled [sic] from my eyes. Family members and friends tried to console me. My heart was broken and I wanted to be alone in a dark room. After the funeral some weeks later I felt the presence of my loved one in my bedroom. First I was afraid, but his spirit calmed my spirit and I remember feeling removed from my worries and lost [sic]. There was a sweet, sweet spirit in my presence. From that moment I found peace and joy.

Grievors sometimes cannot explain this After Death Communication experience.

It is a special gift from God. Is 61:1-3 details the following account:

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<sup>4</sup> James and Friedman, 8.

The Spirit of the Lord God has taken control of me! The Lord has chosen and sent me to tell the oppressed the good news, to heal the brokenhearted, and to announce freedom for prisoners and captives... The Lord has sent me to comfort those who mourn, especially in Jerusalem. He sent me to give them flowers in place of their sorrow, olive oil in place of tears, and joyous praise in place of broken hearts.  
(Is 61:1-3 CEV)

For several respondents in this study, after-death experiences were part of normal human experience. As related by the respondents, after-death experiences played several positive roles, fulfilling their needs to be reassured that their loved ones were at peace. This brought peace to the grieving ones.

The follow-up phone survey revealed the respondents' attitudes toward After Death Communication, their experiences of ADC, experiences of ADC shared with them by others, and their opinions about the utility of a bereavement/grief facility in their communities.

Almost all (eleven out of twelve) respondents believe After Death Communication is possible. Ten out of twelve have had an After Death Communication experience.

Eight out of twelve have experienced one or more kinds of After Death Communication with a deceased loved one or friend; two have not; and two were uncertain.

Of ten kinds of After Death Communication experiences respondents were questioned about during the phone survey, the most commonly reported were:

- sensing a presence [9 respondents]
- receiving a sign (through music, writing, etc.) [9 respondents]
- seeing an appearance [8 respondents]

- receiving a “warning” of a death before knowing of it [8 respondents].

Least common After Death Communication experiences reported in this study were:

- telephone call [1 respondent]
- object(s) moving [2 respondents]
- feeling a touch [3 respondents].

Mid-range After Death Communication experiences reported in this study were:

- electrical manipulation (flashing lights, etc.) [6 respondents]
- hearing a voice [5 respondents]
- smelling an aroma [4 respondents].

Nine out of twelve respondents report that others have shared After Death Communication experiences with them. Of the same ten kinds of After Death Communication experiences included in the phone survey, those most commonly shared with the respondents by others were:

- sensing a presence [8 respondents]
- seeing an appearance [7 respondents]
- receiving a “warning” [6 respondents].

The least common After Death Communication experience reported as shared with the respondents by others was telephone call [2 respondents].

Mid-range After Death Communication experiences reported as shared with the respondents by others were:

- hearing a voice [5 respondents]
- receiving a sign [5 respondents]
- object(s) moving [4 respondents]

- electrical manipulations [4 respondents]
- feeling a touch [3 respondents]
- smelling an aroma [3 respondents].

Other types of After Death Communication experiences not included in the phone survey script, but reported by respondents were: dreams [3 respondents] and a ringing sound in the ear as a sign that someone has died [1 respondent], colloquially known as “death bells.”

The respondents reported that among those who had shared After Death Communication experiences with them, females greatly outnumbered males (eight to one).

Eleven out of twelve respondents indicated it would be helpful to them and others to have a bereavement/grief facility in their community. The remaining respondent was uncertain.

Respondents’ comments shared as to how such a facility would be helpful were:

- “People who are grieving a loved one can have a place to go for help”
- “For people to sit and talk”
- “Sharing with others”
- “Provide comfort and understanding of their grief”
- “To have a place to talk about your grief” and
- “Help people to talk about their grief.”

Nine respondents felt a community center would be the best location for a bereavement center for both church-goers and the unchurched; two felt a church building would be

best; and two suggested other locations: home, and a self-standing grief counseling center (separate building of its own). The majority of respondents were church-goers.

The analysis of the phone survey shows that for this group of respondents, After Death Communication is not a strange or unbelievable concept, and After Death Communication experiences are not rare or uncommon. The research illustrates that After Death Communication experiences can help bring the process of bereavement to peaceful resolution. People feel free to share After Death Communication experiences with others when they know they will not be stigmatized. The respondents would welcome more opportunities to talk with others about their grief as they work through it, and a community bereavement facility could be an appropriate setting for this to take place.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Collecting stories on grief experienced as a result of losing a loved one or something valued from twelve diverse people from Appalachia was a challenge. The distance traveled between the respondents was incredible from West Virginia to Virginia. Reading their stories and hearing their words of grief reignited a fire within the researcher that had been missing for quite some time.

Thanks be to God, the author has again the fire that burns freely. Reading the facial expressions and body movements of these respondents took her back many years and allowed her to revisit some of her own losses and remember how God's love sustained and strengthened her through those difficult times.

When the bereaved grieve for a loved one, God's love is unconditional. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (Jn 3:16). God gave God's only Son that humankind may be freed from sin by asking for forgiveness. How much more will God give to us for comfort and peace? God loves us so much! Would God not allow the bereaved to receive communication from the deceased to bring us peace and comfort? God's acts of love give God's children many ways to believe and trust in God and God's

Son, the Savior, Jesus Christ. Facing the death of a loved one with God's help, putting hope in Christ and being willing to experience the journey of grief promote healing.

After Death Communication is a natural gift of consolation for the bereaved, and "for God, all things are possible." (Mt 19:26).

There are, of course, other ways to interpret After Death Communication. It may be considered a psychological phenomenon, "wishful thinking," self-deception, or a psychic occurrence. It may be thought to be a spiritual activity not of God, a spiritual deception. But even if there is some truth in these other interpretations, that does not exclude the possibility that God is still at work, for God, the creator of all, is the Lord of all spirits and all things, even those that deny or try to thwart God.

Dreams are another way that God brings communication, guidance, warning or comfort. "Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." (Joel 2:28).

Deathbed visions are another kind of After Death Communication. There have been times when working in a hospital that the author has witnessed a dying person suddenly reach out and speak, welcoming an unseen guest. Sometimes they have said, "I see Jesus reaching out to take me home," or the dying person may talk with a deceased loved one. Deathbed visions have been around for centuries. They are noted for brief visits by spirits, angels or deceased loved ones, minutes or days before a person's death. The visions have a purpose to comfort, relate peace and reassure the dying person during their transition to the other side.

God's love is immeasurable. "Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." (Neh 8:10b). God is constantly offering individuals signs in their lives, and it is

not necessary to be a psychic in order to receive information or communication from God. All persons are given signs from God, and they usually ignore them. All they need do is open themselves to receive.

“Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. . . . By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” (Heb 11:1,3).

### **Evaluation and Conclusions**

Grief is the difficult and necessary process of healing and finding peace within. Analysis of the stories these twelve Appalachian respondents shared about their grief, as well as the author’s own experiences of grief, confirm what the literature review reveals about the nature and process of grief: there is no right or wrong way to grieve, but grief and the bereavement process are healthy, natural parts of overcoming the loss of a loved one.

Respondents were debriefed and shared their evaluations of the research orally with the researcher. They said their participation in the research, including sharing personal experiences of grief, has helped them to acknowledge their grief and aided the bereavement process it took them through.

Through the research, it is apparent that it is important for Appalachian people to have a safe place where they can share the pain and suffering of their grief. They need to express their grief; and they need someone, or some others, with whom they can share their sorrows, who will listen quietly without telling them what they should or should not

feel, do or say. This is well expressed in the anonymous poem, *Listen*, included as Appendix F.

In the process of collecting this data, the research shows that men and women have different ways of expressing their grief. Men are less verbal; women talk and write more freely. The research finds that Appalachian people are willing to unveil their experiences of After Death Communication with others who have had similar After Death Communication experiences. Those who claim not to have had an After Death Communication experience—if they are open to listening without bias to those who have had After Death Communication experiences—might even learn that they have had such an experience without realizing it. The results of the phone survey revealed detailed information about the variety of After Death Communication experiences that have occurred among the respondents, and indicated that the majority of respondents would find it helpful to have a bereavement facility in their community.

The author's contextual and professional associates have been very helpful throughout the process of this doctoral project, and in hindsight, could have been called upon for even more support. Evaluations from contextual and professional associates have been included in Chapter Four.

### **Into the Future**

Today, because of her own experiences of grief, the author has a deep desire to help others, especially women, recognize and learn to deal with grief. She believes this is her special gift from God.

As the researcher considers the calling to follow up this project with a pastoral counseling and support service specializing in bereavement, in reality, this process has already begun. In addition to continuing to offer pastoral services, the researcher recently conducted a weekly grief support group for persons who were displaced from New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina at Camp Dawson, in Preston County, WV.

Future plans for implementation of the research include revisiting the six-week women's grief support group which was part the original research model, as well as organizing four-week grief support groups for men, women, children and families. Plans are also in the works to offer bereavement workshops for the bereaved and for bereavement caregivers from Appalachia, and also for those from outside the Appalachian region.

As a setting for these and other related services, including retreats, the author plans to establish a bereavement facility in Appalachia.

**APPENDIX A**

**LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS REQUESTING PARTICIPATION**

## BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH

Grief is an emotion we all must experience at some time or other. Each of us faces the loss of someone or something dear to us. The death of a loved one, loss of health, loss of a job, or even intense disappointment can cause grief. As you write your grief stories, think about Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's five stages of grief:

1. Denial and Isolation
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

## THE NARRATIVE FORMAT

Write at least two stories about your losses. Questions to consider:

1. Write about the death of a loved one.
2. Write about your loss of something that brought grief (sadness) to your life.

In each story, tell what has helped you the most during your grief.

Thank you for agreeing to write your stories.

Please send stories back to me before April 9 in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.

Gratefully,

Elizabeth Allen-Villinger

**APPENDIX B**

**PERMISSION FORM FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

## BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH PERMISSION FORM

Female

Male

(please circle one)

Date of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your name and other names or names of places in your narrative (story) are confidential and will not be used in my research.

I give my permission for my story to be used and shared in whatever format needed, such as workshops, grief groups, print, or storytelling.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Research 2005

I give my permission for my responses to the personal or phone interview to be used for the purpose of this Grief Research

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Thank you for your participation,

Elizabeth Allen-Villinger

## **APPENDIX C**

### **DATA: SELECTED PARTICIPANT STORIES SHARED**

## John's Story

John, a middle-aged Caucasian man, shared this story:

My grief story is more of an anti-grief story, as I believe much of the way people handle grief is mostly a learned reaction to death and/or separation influenced by perspective. I was raised in a family that celebrated death. I remember as a very young child going to my grandparents' funerals at which there were grand parties with lots of food, sometimes catered, sometimes covered-dish, and excellent bands for dancing. However, my favorite part of family funerals has to be that of seeing and spending time with relatives I didn't get to see that much in the normal course of daily life. These are my earliest memories of the "death experience" and from those memories combined with my Christian perspective now as an adult, I have a hard time understanding how grief-stricken many Christians can get.

Most recently for me, death struck my oldest sister in 1999 after her fierce nine-year battle with cancer. Knowing she accepted Christ as her Savior, I was consoled in knowing that I would see her again worshipping God in Heaven as my faith understands it. An interesting story about her death is that when she was on her "death bed" I got a call at work to go immediately to the hospital as Nanette (my sister) was in her final moments of life. So I left work in Petersburg, WV and drove to Bethesda Naval Hospital just outside D.C. and during rush hour to boot. The trip took almost five hours, but my sister held on until I got there. As I entered the room, everyone yelled at her that I was there. At that she breathed her last. My family is convinced that she held on until we were all there. The comfort we have knowing that she waited to die until she knew all her family was there is beyond anything I could express in words.

To know the risen Savior is a cause to celebrate, knowing that in death we have life. Is there some sadness related to Nanette's death? Well of course. But the joy I have in knowing that she is now fully worshipping our Lord is cause for witnessing to those poor souls who try to handle grief without the knowledge of a Lord who takes those cares and worries away not only by his Spirit but with the knowledge that there is no death to those who believe.

### **Red's Story**

Red, a retired Caucasian man, shared this story:

It was after midnight when the telephone call came that I had imagined would someday come; my mother had been taken to the hospital with a heart attack. I rushed to the hospital to find her in the cardiac care unit, connected to many machines by many tubes. She was awake, but could not talk because of a breathing tube in her mouth and down her throat. She was very uncomfortable, but helpless to do anything about it, and I felt helpless, too.

At the age of 89, Mother was feeling her age and its limitations, but she had not had, as far as I know, any recent warning of the attack that struck her that night.

As her nearest family member I had not only been visiting her regularly, but had also been doing things for her that she could no longer do for herself. I took her shopping when she felt up to it, or did it for her when she didn't. I would take her to visit her sister, who is older than she. For several years, since a previous hospital stay, I had helped her take care of her financial affairs. In fact, as so often happens, I had taken on the role of parent to my parent. Her increasing dependence on me actually brought us closer together

than we had been when she was more independent, especially when her husband, my stepfather, was still living.

I'm glad we had such a good, close relationship that I didn't feel any regret or guilt about not having done things I should have done. But our closeness also made it more of a shock when she was struck so suddenly.

I stayed with her in the hospital that night (early morning), and I know she was glad I was there. When she was able to rest some, I went out to make phone calls to other family and go to her apartment to make sure it was all right (and to rest some, myself). Back at the hospital that day I stayed with her as much as I could. Her condition was critical but stable, and I hoped she could recover. Later that evening she seemed a little better (not in immediate danger), so I went back to the apartment to sleep. The next morning she still seemed better. Though she could not talk, she was alert, and could write things down. She had locked her desk at home and I didn't know where the key was, so I asked her; she grinned and wrote to tell me where to find it. I went back and found the key, then went back to tell her I had found it. Since she still seemed to me to be stable, and she urged me to go, I went out to have lunch, telling her, as I did whenever I left, that I loved her and would see her later.

When I got back to her apartment the phone was ringing. It was her nurse telling me to come right back to the hospital; mother had taken a turn for the worse. When I got there the doctor, whom I had not met before, told me they had done everything they could, but they had not been able to revive her. That's how I found out that she had died, just a few minutes before. Her kidneys had failed and she had another sudden heart attack.

They let me stay with her body, now free from all the tubes and machines. She was at peace, no longer suffering. I prayed and told her I loved her and would see her again, and kissed her for the last time.

I was calm and under control (or maybe just numb) as I did all the things that needed to be done, telephone calls and arrangements, until I called our daughter; then I got choked up and had a hard time talking for a little while.

My denial was in thinking mother would recover; I was so hopeful (or in denial) that I didn't think I had to stay in the hospital "around the clock" as so many families do. If I had seen the doctor before and he had told me how poor her chances for recovery were, maybe I would have been there when she died. But as suddenly as the second attack came, it probably would not have made any difference for her.

Mother had a living will, but when they asked me if I wanted a "do not resuscitate" order, I asked her if she wanted them to try to bring her back if she had another attack and she nodded yes, so I think what they did was what she wanted. I regret that she died, but I think I would regret it more if she had lived longer but been more helpless and suffering. I miss her, but I know she is living with God, and I will be, too, so her death is not her end; we will be together again, thanks be to God!

### **Rose's Stories**

Rose, an older Caucasian woman, who firmly believes in God's power, first tells about an After Death Communication:

Well, I was having a very hard time after I lost my husband, because I didn't have no one [sic] to go to but God. I said, "God, I just need to know he is OK." My husband

hated to leave me, because he loved me so. I need to know he is happy. I was in bed and I was not asleep, and I heard my husband's laughter. It was a robust laughter. And when his laughter was a robust one he was very happy. And I said, "OK, Lord." After that, there was a vision, and the vision I had seen was a long table that never seem [sic] to end. A bunch of people sitting about at the table, and they were all dressed in white. And I seen [sic] my husband there, and he was happy and smiling. And I started to cry, because I knew God was giving me something special to see. I said, "Thank you, Lord." And it went away. By that time, I lost it. I heard, "I love you forever." I cried and cried and cried; I knew that God let me hear from my husband. When he wrote me love letters and notes, he would sign them, "Love you forever." And I don't care what anyone says about what I seen [sic]. I know that God let me experience this to help me through the loss of my husband. It was not always easy, but each day I got stronger and stronger, and was able to handle it, because God gave me these things to see. When I told my daughter about it, she said, "Now Mom, don't you say anything to anyone about this." And I said to her, "Yes, I am, too." I told people, and they could believe me or not, because I never underestimate the power of God. All things are possible with God. And he has a way of helping us come through everything. We just have to depend on him completely, when you have no one to count on or help you. You have to depend on God all the time.

Rose also shares the following story about her grandsons and their experience with their deceased grandfather:

My daughter said she felt her dad's presence when he passed away. And my grandsons said they seen [sic] someone watching from the window upstairs. They were outside and they went to the kitchen and asked their mom why she was watching out the

window. And she said, “I was not watching out the window.” The grandsons said, “Stop, Mom. Stop kidding us. You were watching from the window.” And she said, “I am not kidding.” Then she went up to the room. When she came back down, she said, “Mother, I knew it must have been Dad coming one more time to see his grandsons.”

And then my grandson came in for the summer and set by the maple tree where he and his Paw Paw sat. And he started talking. He talked for about a half an hour. We were watching him, my daughter and I, and we asked him, “Who were you talking to?” And he said, “Paw Paw.” He said Paw Paw said he was OK, and that I didn’t have to worry. He was OK, and he was smiling. I knew he was talking to somebody, and I didn’t doubt it. I know the power of God. And I knew God was helping my grandson to come to the terms of losing his grandfather. I have no doubt about it.

### **Mary’s Story**

Mary, a young Caucasian woman, relates this story:

When I was about fifteen years old, I was in a girls’ group home, with six other girls. My roommate and I were downstairs near our room in the hallway, and heard things breaking, falling to the floor. So we ran into the room, and no one was down there but us. When we went into the room, pictures were broken and some glass objects were cracked. Those objects had been thrown across the room. We were shocked, and didn’t know what to think. That night a couple of us girls sat in a circle with a candle and was [sic] talking to whatever it was. We would hear tapping noises on the CD player, lights flickering, and the second time doing this I felt cold chills and a little girl with long blonde hair, pink and

black dress, was touching my shoulder when I turned around. After that, I would talk to her, and the staff brought a preacher in to bless the room, and after that I never saw her. The weird thing is, the girl looked just like me when I was little. My mom said she had the same room when she was there and strange things would happen, but she never saw anyone.

### **Ellen's Story**

Ellen, an elderly Caucasian woman, who has experienced a lot of family grief, tells this story:

Yes, the one thing I had was my mom. My mom helped people; she delivered their babies and she set by them when they died, and she did everything she could do. And I learned from her what to do since my grandma came and was sick. I miss them, but I don't miss them in such a way that it stops me from going ahead. I mean, that was the one thing that Mom gave me, was to know that you have to go forward and do what you can do. And I stressed over that thing of forgiveness. That has taken me longer than anything. Things like that. They have bothered me more than having to see someone sick and they go ahead and die. I miss them. I don't know how I grieve. I think maybe sometimes different songs will come to light; I may sing or something like that. I can't remember. I would not want them to be here if they could not enjoy life. You get that feeling, I got it before my husband's mother got out of the house. Because she was sick the night before, and I was sitting there talking to her. And I told her I didn't feel very well; I was beginning to not feel very well at the time. "I want you to know, you have been very easy to take care of. And if you are ready to go, if it is your time to go, don't

worry about us, just go ahead.” And she smiled; and before I could call my husband, she was gone. I don’t know what happened; maybe she gave me relief when she smiled. It was so peaceful, so peaceful.

### **Grace’s Story**

Grace, an elderly African-American woman who has lost many family members, tells this story:

I am a third child of fourteen children. And I am one of two children still living. Many of my family members have died, and I miss them all. It hurts when I remember all the years we had together. I miss my husband the most, but I know he is in a better place. And I hope to meet him one day. I miss him very much.

One night I was thinking about him and his spirit came to my bedroom and sat at the bottom of the bed. I was not afraid, because I remember my husband. He wanted me to know that everything would be all right.

I remember talking with him, telling him I love him and missed him. For years there has been a spirit, or I call it an angel, that is with me, usually behind me, protecting, and warns me from danger. I don’t know if it is my husband’s spirit or what, but when I am sad or lonely I pray to the Lord for help. I miss my husband a lot. He worked hard most of the time, making a good living for his family. I miss him and one day we will be together again. I know we all must die.

### **Cat’s Stories**

Cat, A middle-aged Caucasian woman, has two stories, one about the death of a loved one, and one about a loss:

It was early on a crisp November, Sunday morning. I was still in bed, dreaming pleasant dreams. The ringing of the telephone, all of a sudden, rudely interrupted my peaceful slumber. As for most people, a ringing phone at that hour of the morning boded no good news for me, so my heart was thumping and my breath was shallow as I said "Hello." The voice on the other end was unfamiliar and said, "Is this \_\_\_\_\_?" I said "Yes, who is this?" To which she replied, "This is 911, you are needed at your mother's house, your father is unresponsive." I said, "Who?" Now my father passed away in 1982 and this was 1999. She said, "Your father is unresponsive." Now I know I was rudely awakened, and now frightened because something had obviously happened at my mother's house, but this woman had mistaken who was sick, what else was she wrong about? This was all buzzing around in my mind as I was trying to figure out what was really going on. So, I said to her, "Look lady, my father died in 1982, now who is unresponsive at my mother's house?" She replied, "The information that I have is, "Roy is unresponsive." I then screamed at her, because we had wasted 5 minutes discussing my long deceased father when it was my brother who was unresponsive. I slammed the phone down, raced by my husband yelling what was wrong, pulled on some type of clothing and raced up the road to my mother's praying all the way.

Now, a little history of my family. I'm the middle child of 4 siblings. I have an older brother, Bill, who is 4 years, my senior. He was born in 1950. I was born in 1954. The twins, Joy and Roy, were born in 1958. Bill grew up, graduated from high school, joined the Navy and left home normally. When he returned from the Navy, he married and began his own life. I graduated from high school, my father got me a job and I got married, moved out, started my family and began my own life. Roy was gay. Joy was the

baby. They both graduated high school. Roy left home eventually going to New York, living the gay life, abusing drugs and alcohol. Joy got a job and remained at home, where she still remains to this day. While in New York, Roy suffered mightily. He was a small town boy, who was in a big town. He never found happiness, tried to commit suicide several times, calling my mother each time exposing her to his despair at that distance each time. She in turn called me seeking comfort from me that I didn't have to give her. I tried. She was afraid, I was afraid. He was miles away. We all lived in fear until we heard from him again. Then he'd call, high on life, quite unaware of the despair he had left in the wake of his last phone call. My poor mother bore it with grace and strength. It always took a little out of me and left me a little depleted, a little less each time. Finally, he hit bottom. Mother sent Bill and his wife to New York to bring Roy home. He'd lost his job, was sick and had no place to go. So, home he came with his meager belongings and a psychotic, large white cat named December.

Roy was an alcoholic and did OK for a while, however, eventually his kidneys failed. He had to go on dialysis. He did hemodialysis for a few years, and then he did peritoneal dialysis for several years and then had to go back on hemodialysis. Dialysis is very hard on your heart. The force of the machine pulling your blood through your circulatory system puts a huge strain on your heart.

Now back to my story, Mother, Joy and Roy and December slept in the same room. Mother and Roy had beds on opposite sides of the room. December slept with Roy and Joy slept in a recliner in the other corner of the room. She's a large person and unable to sleep in a bed. Early that morning, Roy had awakened hungry. He went to the kitchen, made a chicken salad sandwich and brought it back to the bedroom. Mother was still

asleep. Joy had awakened. He sat on the edge of his bed, across from Joy's chair and was eating. They were talking. He choked and began coughing. Mother wakes up. I guess he has a massive MI in front of my Mother and his twin, falling in the floor, striking his head on a floor lamp and neither of them can do anything to save him. I can only imagine their horror.

The horror I walk into was bad enough. My sister is sitting in the kitchen with the phone to her ear, talking to 911, who won't let her go until I get there. Neighbors are milling around. Tears are streaming down her face. She reaches for me, knowing that I'll fix it, as I have often fixed things in the past for them. I hugged her and whispered in her ear that it would be all right, not really knowing what was going on. I look toward the bedroom. Another neighbor is holding my Mother, who is in her pajamas and on the floor crying. She does not have her glasses on, and is reaching towards the bedroom, keening for Roy. She realizes I'm there and then reaches for me. I hug her and she asks me what's going on. I try to assess the situation. Paramedics are performing CPR on my brother, his face is black, there is froth coming from his mouth, I know it's hopeless. I catch the eye of the neighbor holding up my mother and he shakes his head "NO" and I acknowledge that I understand. But I don't want to completely destroy my Mother at the moment. So, I make a decision. I know that they have to take him to the hospital for a physician to declare the death. So I tell her that they are going to transport him to my hospital and they will try to work on him. Joy can bring her down. I'll go with Roy and the ambulance and meet them down there.

She calms down and says "OK." She has a plan. The ambulance workers bring in the gurney, drop my brother two times before they get him on it, making me and my

Mother shudder each time. I tell Joy of the plan. She is in such shock of having watched her twin basically die in front of her that she accepts the hope and says "OK." I leave with the ambulance and the assurance that the neighbors will help my Mother and sister, as I can't be in both places at one time.

As I follow the ambulance to Welch, I watch the paramedic continuing to perform CPR on Roy all the way to the hospital. I'm praying all the way down the road, for Roy, Mother, Joy and me. Because I know, I'm going to have to face whatever the news was going to be. We get to the hospital. The paramedic, someone we have all known all our life is exhausted, as Roy was a large, barrel-chested man. I hugged and thanked him for his efforts and he was crying because he knew that Roy was gone. I told him that it was all right, that he had done his best and his job. That was all I could ask of him. The ER went into full swing, RNs, Doctor and Respiratory, full code. I watched. All of the staff, people that I work with every day, watching me as they work, knowing this was my brother, feeling my pain, going above and beyond, knowing it was useless but doing it anyway because it was family. Finally, Dr. Johnson calls it. Each staff member leaves the area, hugs and consoles me, and I sink to the ground. Dr. Johnson comes over and asks if there is anyone he can call. I ask him if they can clean Roy up, that my Mother and his twin is [sic] on their way down and will want to say good bye. He said that he would take care of that for me. I took one last look at my younger brother. His face was black, his eyes red with petichia from the oxygen starvation and the tube down his throat where they had bagged him. I was mad, lost, hurt, broken, and sad all at once. But, I only had a moment because I knew that Mom and Joy would soon be there and they would need me to be strong for them. So, I touched his forehead and told him goodbye, turned and went

to the nurse's station, called my husband and told him that Roy had died. Called a friend at church to let her know that I wouldn't be at church that morning and to ask her to ask for prayer for my family. Then went to the ambulance entrance to wait for my family.

Mother and Joy arrived. Joy walked in and I got a wheelchair for Mom. I took them back to the bay where Roy was, telling them on the way that he had passed away, got a chair for Joy and waited with them as they said goodbye. Joy sat there until gases began bubbling out of Roy's mouth. She immediately said, "Well, it's time to go."

I think the thing that has hurt Mom the most about Roy's death is that Roy wanted to be cremated. Mother, post-stroke, cannot understand where he is and why we did not bury him. To her we just "threw him away." I think that hurts me the most. It's hard enough for a mother to lose a child, but she watched him die in front of her, watched the ambulance staff drop him not once but twice from the gurney to the floor, and then there was not closure with a wake and funeral with a body. The day after his death, Mom and I went to a doctor's appointment. I remember sitting beside her in the waiting room. We were both sitting there, holding hands, heads leaning back against the wall, I was singing a hymn under my breath and she asked me where Roy was? She missed him. I told her I knew she did, reminded her that he had passed away and the hurt was fresh again. We hugged each other, cried a little and said nothing to the doctor of our loss. That's my Mom. I love her dearly and would die to protect her.

Grief, my life's been full of grief of various sorts. Starting with my Dad's Rheumatoid Arthritis and it's affect [sic] on our lives, my aunt's stroke, my grandmother's stroke, my mother's stroke, my sister's disabilities, my brother's death, two of brother-in-laws committing suicide, my father-in-law's death, and my diagnosis

with Lupus-fibro-and Osteoarthritis. Grief is a fact of life; it is a test of God I think. Grief is a growth process, a learning process. Each experience with grief teaches you something about yourself, if you choose to be aware of it and use it that way. You cannot wallow in grief. It's easy to do that, and sometimes you need to, for a while. Sometimes, you need to revisit the grief you felt, as I have in writing this; however, God wants us to move on and use the grief to become better loving, more humble people because of the human emotion of grief. That's my opinion anyway.

Cat's second story:

I'm a very independent person. I'm strong and very able to take care of myself. On October 3, 2004, I was diagnosed with Fibromyalgia. Upon my research in the following month, I came to realize that my life was beginning to change. On November 5, 2004, on a return visit to the Rheumatologist I was informed that one of my blood tests was positive for Lupus. Oh, and I also had Osteoarthritis. The doctor stated this very matter-of-factly, with no emotion or compassion. He informed me that he was going to do additional blood work and started me on medication for Lupus and arthritis. I was alone and he provided no information on Lupus, leaving me to research for myself.

When I originally made the appointment with this physician, who is my sister's Rheumatologist, I thought he was going to tell me I had Rheumatoid Arthritis. I had researched my symptoms and due to my father having had RA, I knew that I had it as well. I trusted this physician, having taken my sister to him for over four years and seeing the progress he had made with her and her case of Osteoarthritis. You could have knocked me over with a feather when he said Lupus.

I was so upset that while they took the ten (10) vials of blood they needed for the remaining tests, I began to cry and almost passed out. The LPN and the Physician rushed in concerned about me. I became embarrassed and brushed it off, just wanting to get out of there. As soon as I left, I called my sister, as my husband was at work. We talked a few minutes and I calmed down. During the ensuing month, I convinced myself that I couldn't have Lupus. I researched everywhere I could and just knew I didn't have it.

On December 3, 2004, my sister and I both had doctor's appointments on the same day with the Rheumatologist. As usual, the nurse put both of us in the same room. The doctor came in and treated Joy first. He then turned to me and said, "The tests confirmed that you have Lupus. I'm glad that I started you on the medication last month." My sister and I looked at each other and grabbed hands. The visit continued as normal.

This multiple diagnosis has resulted in the loss of my life, as I knew it. As I've stated at the beginning, I'm very independent and strong. I'm the go to girl. I'm the one who gets things done. "Cat will do it" is the mantra that is heard in most meetings. Now, I have to learn to say "No." I fight guilt daily or even hourly sometimes. I get so tired and sleepy. My body aches from top to bottom and now my hands and feet have started swelling and aching badly despite the thirteen prescriptions that I take daily. My poor husband doesn't understand. He just takes each day as it comes and how I feel at each moment, not expecting anything from me. My mother-in-law thinks that it will get better if I just rest. My boss thinks if I just think positively things will get better. I'm not sure what my children think because they really have not spoken much to me about it.

Me, I alternate between being very depressed to being in denial to feeling sorry for myself to acceptance to being so afraid that I can hardly breathe. It's the hardest when

I'm alone because that's when my mind buzzes with the "what ifs." I try to keep focused on God, and when I'm successful remain quite positive knowing that through him all things are possible.

I'm not able to clean my house like I used to and have just asked a friend of mine to help me this week. I can't walk through the mall from one end to the other, through the grocery store from beginning to end or through Wal-Mart without ending up in excruciating pain. At work, I have to get up from my desk every hour and walk around to keep my joints from becoming so stiff that I can't move. This makes long meetings or interviews a challenge. I've had to change my hours at work. I had previously worked 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with an hour for lunch. With this schedule and my condition, by 2:30 p.m. I become so tired or sleepy and foggy that it's very hard to concentrate. So I had to get my physician to write an order to change my schedule to 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This works most weeks. However, there is [sic] still weeks that some days I don't get out at 3:00 p.m.

With Lupus, I'm supposed to avoid stressful situations. I'm a Human Resources Director at an acute care hospital with over 300 employees. I'm part of the senior management team. Stress is my middle name at work. I also have a lot of stress with my mother and sister and their health care. So, I'm not able to take appropriate care of myself that causes some friction between my husband and myself. This is another loss for me. I can't seem to be able to talk with my husband about my fears because I feel the need to protect him. Men have the need to be able to fix things. And, he can't fix what's wrong with me. So, why burden him with it. Yet, I crave the need to sap his strength because mine is running low. I've lost our close relationship because he doesn't really know what

goes through my mind. Kind of selfish, I guess you might think, but to me, I'm protecting him. I'm probably failing him, who knows?

At any rate, I feel that I've lost control over my life, my future and the possibility of any plans for retirement that my husband and I had for travel. I watched my father suffer, I've watched my sister's world get smaller and smaller from arthritis and fear that I'm looking at myself. I feel guilty for doing this to my husband but don't know how to change it other than to make different choices than they did, keep going as long as I can and keep praying.

### **Mae's Story**

It has been several years since my mother's passing, August 1995, to be exact. As for my grief, that actually started in 1987 when my mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and placed in a nursing facility. For several months prior to her admission to the nursing facility, I tried to care for her at home, however she had other illnesses in addition to the dementia which required skilled nursing care. I believe the real grieving began when I had to accept I was not only losing my mother to dementia, but the opportunity to have a loving and close relationship with my mother, something I had always yearned for was now lost forever. It's one thing to not be your mother's favorite child, but somehow you always have that hope, that someday you will be, however, when mother's mind began to go and the roles of parent and child were reversed, I knew all chances of ever making up for lost time were gone. And that's when the grieving began. That stage of grieving lasted eight years. Eight years of watching her deteriorate mentally, losing her abilities to play the piano, something she had always loved to do.

Eight years of living three states away from her, visiting and calling her when I could, constantly dreading the call. You know the call we all dread to get, the call telling us our parents are dying or have died. It was so hard watching and waiting from a distance and yet at the same time, knowing she hated being in the nursing facility, praying for God's mercy to be swift. That was a grieving period for me, knowing she was alive and yet I couldn't go to her and talk about things mothers and daughters talk about. We couldn't go shopping. We couldn't share fun times. I could just sit and visit her, watch her cry, and watch how frightened she was because she didn't understand what was happening to her. To me that was pure grief, pure hell. When her time finally came, I remember very clearly that day the call came. my youngest brother called and said mother was very sick and they were doing tests. I left for PA that very day and drove most of the night. When I arrived at the nursing home I was not prepared for how she looked. She was completely jaundiced and in severe pain. It took only a few days to diagnose her with aggressive liver cancer. Within ten days, my prayers were answered, God's mercy was swift and mother was gone. As I look back, I remember worrying about Mother's spiritual states for many years since I knew she had never confessed Jesus Christ as her personal savior, but when I arrived that morning at the home, amidst all the sickness, all the pain, all the mental confusion, I sensed a peace about my mother. A peace I had never seen in her before. Although some things still remain a blur to me about that time period, there's something I do remember very clearly. I kept praying to God to somehow let me be a shining light to mom and everyone around me. You see, everyone kept waiting for me to break down, or lose my temper about something, and I must admit, for most of my life, that's how I would react when I didn't know how to handle things. But not this time, this

time I had God in my life and I just kept praying and singing softly to mother. Before my mother lost all consciousness, I remember one morning we were sitting together, and her mind was especially clear, she said those words that I had for so long waited to hear. She really did love me. Somehow, I felt as though I had gotten that chance back, if only for a short time to become close to her. The Lord finally took her home. I remember being thankful for his mercy and for an end to her suffering, both mentally and physically, but I still wasn't sure about her salvation. I still wasn't sure if she was in heaven. So I continued to pray for a sign from her or God to let me know she was okay. About three weeks later in the middle of the night, I got a sign assuring me she indeed is in heaven. Remember, how I said I had prayed about being a shining light to everyone, well my sign came in the form of a nightlight that was in my bedroom but never turned on. I had gotten up around 3am to go to the bathroom and when I returned to my bedroom, the room was completely illuminated from that small night light. At first I wondered who had turned on the light but a still small voice soon told me. Do I still grieve? Some, but not as much as I did when I knew she was trapped inside of a body and a mind she no longer had control of.

**APPENDIX D**  
**PHONE SURVEY INTRODUCTION**

Hello. This is Elizabeth, a doctoral student from United Theological Seminary, calling you with a follow-up survey concerning grief for a loved one. Your survey name is \_\_\_\_\_.

Do you agree to take part in this survey? Yes or No.

Do you also agree that I may use your information for my dissertation and for other occasions as needed? Yes or No.

Do you have any questions?

Thank you.

**APPENDIX E**  
**PHONE SURVEY**

Phone Survey Questions  
(Please circle your answers)

1. Do you believe that After Death Communication with the deceased can occur?  

Yes    No    Uncertain    No answer
2. Have you had an After Death Communication experience?  

Yes    No    Uncertain    No answer
3. Have you experienced one or more ways of After Death Communication with a deceased loved one or friend?  

Yes    No    Uncertain    No answer
4. Which type or types of After Death Communication have you experienced?
  - a. Sensing a presence
  - b. Hearing a voice
  - c. Feeling a touch
  - d. Smelling an aroma
  - e. Seeing an appearance
  - f. Telephone call
  - g. Receiving a sign (through music, writing, etc.)
  - h. Object(s) moving
  - i. Receiving a "warning" of a death before knowing of it
  - j. Electrical manipulations (flickering lights, etc.)
  - k. Other \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have others shared their After Death Communication experience(s) with you?  

Yes    No    Uncertain    No answer
6. Which types of After Death Communication experiences have they shared?
  - a. Sensing a presence
  - b. Hearing a voice
  - c. Feeling a touch
  - d. Smelling an aroma
  - e. Seeing an appearance
  - f. Telephone call
  - g. Receiving a sign (through music, writing, etc.)
  - h. Objects moving
  - i. Receiving a "warning" of a death before knowing of it
  - j. Electrical manipulations (flickering lights, etc.)
  - k. Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. Which have been more open to share their After Death Communication experiences with you?  

Females                  Males
8. Would it be helpful for you and others to have a bereavement/grief center in your community?  

Yes    No    Uncertain    No answer
9. How would it be helpful?
10. Which would be the best location for both church-goers and unchurched?  

Church building      Community center      Other \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Listen**

## Listen

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you start giving advice  
you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way,  
you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me  
and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem,  
you have failed me, strange as that may seem.

Listen! All I asked was that you listen  
not talk or do—just hear me.  
Advice is cheap.  
Ten cents will get you both Dear Abby and Billy Graham  
in the same newspaper.  
And I can do for myself; I'm not helpless.  
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself,  
you contribute to my fear and weakness.  
But, when you accept as a simple fact that I do feel what I feel,  
no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you  
and get about the business of understanding  
what's behind this irrational feeling.  
And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.  
Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people  
Because God is mute and He doesn't give advice or try to fix things.  
"They" just listen and let you work it out for yourself.

So, please listen and just hear me.  
And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn;  
I'll listen to you.

Anonymous

**APPENDIX G**  
**A NEPHEW AND FRIEND'S COMPOSITION**

**'Tis a Far Better Place**

Phil 1:23

'Tis a Far Better Place

My Dad, Mom, Brother and Sister passed away on Separate days.  
They went to be with Jesus forever there to stay.

He took them from our presence  
By His Mercy and His Grace  
To Dwell with him in Heaven.

“'Tis a Far Better Place”

The pain and the tears and suffering  
They had upon this earth Will never again Be with them  
Because of their new birth.

It hurt us when they left us.

It left an empty space.

But now they are in Heaven.

“'Tis a Far Better Place”

I know that I will see them When I die and leave this Earth,

Because I, like my family,

Have received the Second Birth.

So I thank thee Lord Jesus

For Your Mercy and Your Grace,

And for taking them to be with you.

“'Tis a Far Better Place”

And now I, Ginny, have gone to be with them there  
To share the joy and comfort that comes with God's eternal care.

If you had the opportunity to see us face to face

And invite us to come back and leave this special place,

I think we would say with smiles upon our faces,

“We love you very much, but this is a ‘far better place”

We will wait for you up here, as you live your life on earth,  
And know that you will be with us when you receive the second birth.

But its alright for you to miss us and to shed a few tears,

But know that we are safe in the hands of God who cares.

I have but one request: that you receive this second birth,

That you may be with Jesus in

“This Far Better Place.”

By Kenneth Ferrell and Ted Barnett  
2005

**APPENDIX H**  
**CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON BIBLICAL VIEWS**

## CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON BIBLICAL VIEWS

The biblical views of death, grief and After Death Communication explored in Chapter Three could well have been influenced by the Israelites' and early Christians' contact with other ancient Near Eastern peoples.

### Death and Life After Death

The Hebrews/Israelites/Jews/Christians, whose history, interpreted through their faith in the one God, YHWH (the LORD), is recorded in their scriptures, lived in contact with peoples of other nationalities, cultures and religions. These contacts influenced their understanding of life, death and life after death in both positive and negative ways. *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* by Alan F. Segal has been very helpful in discerning the influences resulting from these contacts.<sup>1</sup>

In the First Israelite Commonwealth period (ca. 1200 BCE—586 BCE), the primary contacts were with Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan. The direct influence from these cultures seems to be negative. In contrast to “the exuberant pantheon of exalted, loving, quarreling, and warring gods,” “the epic poetry, with its rich texture of myth glorifying the gods and ancient kings,” and a reveling in “a mythical time at the beginning of the world when the gods and humans encountered each other directly” which characterize these other cultures, the Hebrew scriptures relate, in “sturdy and

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<sup>1</sup> Segal, Alan F., *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

understated prose,” an unbroken historical narrative from creation forward of “a *universe* under the direction of a single, moral God.”<sup>2</sup>

Reacting against the polytheistic myths and rituals of their neighbors, especially their closest neighbors, the Canaanites, whose gods they were prohibited from worshipping or even acknowledging, the people of Israel reveal in their scriptures very little interest in life after death. Because all of nature and history come from, and are under the direction of, the LORD, the one and only God, there is no reality in the mythologies of Egypt, Mesopotamia or Canaan, which link the natural world with death and regeneration through elaborate rituals. Hence, “presumably, any extended discussion of life after death or the realm of the dead with its pantheon of divinities would open the door for idolatry or veneration of ghosts which the Bible ... has entirely forbidden.”<sup>3</sup>

Though contact with these cultures is prohibited, there is evidence, even in the Bible, of some influence. For example, the apparent parallels between passages in the Bible and the other cultures’ writings (Ps 90:10-11 with the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic, images in Ps 29 with Canaanite mythology or the similarity of Ps 104 to the Egyptian Akhenaten’s Hymn to Aten) suggest some positive influences.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the total prohibition of any contact with the Canaanites, their gods (chiefly Ba’al and the goddesses Asherah and ‘Anat) or their rituals, even to the extreme of ordering the Israelites to exterminate them, suggests that some, at least, of the Israelites were doing what they were not supposed to do. And the explicit statements about so many of the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 121-122.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 122-124.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 120-121.

kings of Israel and Judah that they “did evil in the eyes of the LORD” and “did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, (Israel’s first king), which he had cause Israel to commit” (e.g. 2 Kgs 15:28), prove it. That their sins included worshipping other gods and following the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them is summarized in detail for Israel (2 Kgs 17:7-23) and for Judah (2 Kgs 17:19-20, 21:2-16). As a result, first Israel, and then Judah, were “removed” from their Promised Land by conquest and exile or captivity.

In the biblical understanding, humans are created by God and given the breath/spirit of life, so life is a gift from God.

Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit) of life, and man became a living being.  
(Gen 2:7)

The gift of life that God has given is God’s to take back again.

When you (the LORD) take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit (breath), they are created”  
(Ps 104:29b-30a).

What was the biblical Israelites’ view of life after death?

In the First Temple period (before 587 BCE), the only hint of human existence after death is the designation of Sheol as the place of the dead, a region under the earth, a place of darkness and silence, a place of rest or “sleep,” from which there is no return. There is, at this time, no suggestion of judgment, punishment or reward after death. That of the deceased which survives death is called in Hebrew *refa*, which means “ghost” or “spirit” or “shade.” It is certainly not an enjoyable afterlife.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 135-136, 142-143.

The most positive expression for death in this period is to be “gathered to one’s fathers (ancestors),” symbolized by being buried together with them in the same place or even having their bones mingled together. Even better is to die “in a good old age” (natural death after a long life), and to be gathered to one’s ancestors, as Abraham was (Gen 25:8).<sup>6</sup>

In the Old Testament, death is the great equalizer: all, rich and poor, wise or foolish, will die.

The only exceptions to the universality of death in the Old Testament are Enoch, who “walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24), and Elijah, who “went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs 2:11). These two who were taken to be with God directly, without dying, are clearly the exceptions that prove the rule, all people will die. This is true because God only gave this special blessing to Enoch and Elijah, but not to the rest of humanity.

Ps 49:15 is a rare departure from the usual Old Testament view of the finality of death:

But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

This verse seems to move in the direction of a hope for life with God beyond death. A few other verses, such as Ps 16:10-11:

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 138-140.

and Ps 73:24:

You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive  
me with honor (or: to glory)

suggest the same hope, based on a sure faith that the LORD is Lord of the living and the dead, with power over life and death. Some commentators suggest that the psalmist in these verses may be hoping that he might share the blessing given to Enoch and Elijah.

While not yet a belief in resurrection, this is a very early movement in that direction.

In the Old Testament, death is to be feared:

The terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling  
come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.  
(Ps 55:4-5)

But death is also to be welcomed, bringing relief from suffering and pain: King Saul, mortally wounded in battle, begged a young man, “Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers.” (The young man performed this “mercy killing,” and paid for it with his life.) (2 Sam 1:8-10, 14-16)

For the righteous, death brings peace: “The righteous perish, and no one takes it to heart . . . the righteous are taken away from calamity, and they enter into peace.” (Is 57:1-2). Why should death always be feared and avoided, when “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones”? (Ps 116:15).

Not until the Second Temple period (515 BCE—70 CE), however, is there any clear idea of a meaningful life after death among the Israelites of the Kingdom of Judah, returned from the Babylonian captivity by the Persians and now called the Jews. The other cultures that could have influenced the Jews during this period were the Persians and the Greeks.

The religion of the Persians, who conquered Babylon and sent the Jews back to Jerusalem, was Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism is strongly dualistic: good and evil are represented by opposing gods. The supreme, good god was Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord), the god of purity and light; the bad god, Angra Mainyu, was the god of darkness. It also includes the belief that the world will come to an apocalyptic end and be reconstituted. And it looks forward to a great day of general resurrection, in which all persons will be raised in perfected spiritual bodies.<sup>7</sup>

The first hints of resurrection in the Hebrew scriptures occur in “Isaiah’s Apocalypse” (Is 24-27):

He will swallow up death forever, and the LORD GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.  
(Is 25:8)

Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise. O dwellers in the dust, awake and sing for joy! For your dew is a radiant dew, and the earth will give birth to those long dead.  
(Is 26:19)

In these passages, Isaiah is referring to peoples or nations, especially the conquered nation of Israel and the threatened nation of Judah, which the LORD will restore after their punishment. This is to give the people of Israel hope that they will be brought back to life as a people, rather than as individual persons. This is clearly the case with the graphic resurrection images of Ez 37 (the restoration of the army from their dry, scattered bones), where the metaphorical intention of the vision to refer to national regeneration is made explicit:

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 176, 178, 190.

Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. . . . I will put my spirit (breath) within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act.”  
(Ez 37:10-12, 14).

Such metaphorical resurrection language prepares the way for, finally, the first literal reference to resurrection in the Hebrew scriptures, Dn 12:1-2:

At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

This scripture, from the Maccabean period (168-165 BCE), is one of the latest to be included in the Hebrew Bible.

The important parallels between the Zoroastrian religion of Persia and Judaism in the Second Temple period are: the apocalyptic expectation of the end of the world and a new beginning, including the figure of the “Son of Man” (Dn 7:13-14); the expectation of a bodily resurrection; elements of a good/evil dualism; and the corporate nature of the resurrected redeemed community.

The other main contact during this period was with Greek, or Hellenistic, culture. After the conquest of the Persian Empire in 332 BCE, led by Alexander the Great, Greece dominated the Mediterranean world. The aspect of Greek thought that had the greatest influence on later Jewish and, especially, Christian theology was the concept of the immortality of the soul developed by the philosopher Plato.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 224.

Plato's philosophy was built on a radical dualism between corruptible matter and perfect, immortal forms or ideals. The true human self is an immortal soul. The material body is a burden to, or a "prison-house" of the immortal soul. Death is a liberation of the soul from the body, to the eternal, immortal realm, a far better state than the corruptible material world from which it has escaped. The goal of the soul is to ascend, by a process of pure thought or intellect to this eternal heaven, sometimes going through several reincarnations in a purification process before finally achieving it.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of the immortality of the soul appealed to the educated, privileged classes, among Jews as well as Greeks, who had the leisure to engage in the intellectual process it required to attain it. Resurrection of the body appealed more to those who rejected the dismissal of the material world as corrupt or evil, remembering that when God created this world God saw it all as "very good" (Gn 1:31). Resurrection also appealed to the persecuted or martyred, whose suffering could thus be vindicated.

These concepts of life after death, resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul, arrived at late in the Old Testament period, are a far cry from the shadowy "life" of the shades in Sheol, typical of the earlier Old Testament period. These later concepts lead directly to the ideas of death and life after death found in the New Testament. In the period between the Old and New Testaments, two religious groups arose among the Jews: the Pharisees, including Saul (Paul), who affirmed the resurrection, and the Sadducees, who denied it.

In the New Testament/Christian scriptures resurrection is crucial, because the heart of the Christian gospel (good news) message is that after his death Jesus was raised

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 234-237.

(resurrected) to new life, and has made this resurrection available to all who have faith in him.

Paul was the first Christian author to address questions regarding resurrection. His most complete discussion of resurrection is found in 1 Cor 15. He first assured the Corinthians that the gospel he handed on to them was the same one he received: the apostolic witness to the death, resurrection and subsequent appearances of Christ (Jesus), including, last of all, an appearance to himself; and that through the apostolic (including his own) proclamation of this gospel they had come to believe (1 Cor 15:1-11). Next, in response to some who deny the possibility of the resurrection of the dead, he makes a long and strenuous argument for the necessity of the resurrection, Christ's and his followers', for it to be a benefit of any value to be a follower of Christ. "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19). In the midst of this argument, he says, of Christ, "For he must reign (after his coming) until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (1 Cor 15:25-26). The heart of Paul's presentation deals with the nature of the resurrection body. Here he comes close to the Zoroastrian view of a perfected, spiritual body, or even to Platonic dualism, when he distinguishes between the physical body and the spiritual body (1 Cor 15:42-44). The resurrection will involve a mysterious transformation from mortality to immortality.

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. ... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ... then the saying that is written will be

fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?'  
(1 Cor 15:50-55)

The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were written later than Paul's letters, but they rely on apostolic eyewitness accounts of the resurrection. Though the synoptic vision of the transfiguration (Mk 9:2-8, Mt 17:1-8, Lk 9:28-36) pictured Jesus as changed in appearance, perhaps as a preview of his glorified resurrection body, his post-resurrection appearances picture him in an ordinary, physical, human body, which can be touched and can eat, to show that he is not a ghost (Lk 24:36-43, Jn 20:26-28, 21:1-14). Though he is able to suddenly appear and disappear, even in locked rooms, and may not be recognized by close friends who would be expected to recognize him, still his risen body on earth apparently does not look out of the ordinary. This is in sharp contrast to the glorified body in which Paul says Jesus appeared to him and blinded him, as reported in Acts 22:6-11, 26:12-18. In the Gospel accounts, the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples for a short period and then ascended to heaven, from whence he is expected to return in glory (Mt 26:64, Lk 24:50-51; also Acts 1:9-11).

The New Testament scriptures are nearly unanimous in the expectation of an apocalyptic return of Jesus, a bodily resurrection of humanity, a cosmic conflict, judgment and establishment of the reign of God over a new creation. But a few passages, such as Lk 23:42-43, "Then he (the criminal being crucified with Jesus) said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' He (Jesus) replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise,'" coupled with the indefinite delay of Jesus' promised return and the growing appeal among Christians of the Platonic immortality of the soul, lead many, down to the present day, to expect and hope for an immediate and

permanent heavenly, spiritual, eternal life. Passages from the Gospel of John referring to eternal life, such as “. . . that everyone who believes in him (Jesus, God’s only Son) may not perish but may have eternal life” (Jn 3:16) and “. . . anyone who hears my (Jesus’) word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life” (Jn 5:24) might be read as immediate. But “. . . the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. . . . all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (Jn 5:25, 28-29) seems to refer to a resurrection in the future, at some time after death. And Jesus’ encounter with Martha, the sister of Lazarus, who had died:

Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die  
(Jn 11:23-26)

reflects both views: before Jesus, hope for life after death was based on a future resurrection, but through faith in Jesus, eternal life is immediate.

So the apparent conflict between future resurrection and immediate immortality as the goal of Christian hope for eternal life must remain a paradox, unless there is an intermediate stage of “waiting,” beyond death, until the final resurrection. Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) shows that there was belief in such a state, or “place,” called Hades. This is the Greek word in the New Testament that translates the Old Testament word Sheol. By the time of Jesus, however, it means more than it did in the Old Testament. In the New Testament it is where the dead go to await the final

resurrection. They are conscious, and are already experiencing rest and comfort or torment, depending on how they lived on earth. So Hades is divided into two parts: a “Paradise,” where the righteous, like the poor, tormented Lazarus, are comforted “in the bosom of Abraham,” and a “Gehenna,” where the evil, like the greedy rich man, suffer fiery anguish. Since a final resurrection at Jesus’ return is expected, Hades is a temporary abode of waiting, though a separation of the righteous from the wicked has already taken place, before the final judgment. This New Testament idea of a two-part Hades may account for the common belief today that the deceased go immediately to Heaven or Hell.

### **Grief in the Bible**

When individuals experience great loss, especially the death of a loved one, friend or person of importance to them, or great disappointment, they have strong emotional feelings of grief, and express these feelings in outward actions of mourning.

The Bible is full of stories of such grieving.

When God saw the wickedness of humankind and the corruption of the earth because of it, God “. . . was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” (Gen 6:6). In grief, God had decided to destroy “all flesh” along with the earth (Gen 6:7, 13). But then God remembered Noah, a righteous, blameless man who found favor in God’s sight, so God spared him, his family, and enough animals to repopulate the earth following the great flood (Gen 6:8-9, 17-21).

The stories about the Hebrew patriarchs, from Abraham through Moses, contain many accounts of grief, mourning the death of loved ones by families, and mourning the death of leaders by the people.

When Sarah, Abraham's wife, died, he "... went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her." (Gen 23:2). Abraham then made arrangements to buy a field with a cave in it near Mamre (Hebron) as a place to bury his dead, and buried Sarah there (Gen 23:3-20). Then Abraham arranged for the marriage of his son, Isaac, who "...brought (Rebekah) into his mother Sarah's tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death." (Gen 24:67). Abraham and Isaac were each, in their turn, when they died, buried by their sons at the same place where Sarah was buried (Gen 25:8-10, 35:28-29).

Jacob (Isaac's son) and his son, Joseph, each grieved for the other. When Joseph's jealous brothers sold him away and deceived their father, Jacob, into thinking his favorite son had been killed and devoured by a wild animal, "... Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all his daughters sought to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and said, 'No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.'" (Gen 37:34-35). Joseph, of course, was alive and ultimately found himself in such a powerful position in Egypt that he was able, in a time of famine, to move his whole family there. Jacob died in Egypt. "Then Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him." (Gen 50:1). Jacob had made Joseph swear to bury him at the family place in Canaan, so, after having his body embalmed and observing the Egyptian seventy-day period of weeping, Joseph, along with his brothers and many others, took Jacob back to Mamre for burial. Along the way they held such a "very great and sorrowful lamentation; and observed a time of mourning" (Gen 50:10) that the Canaanites, impressed by their "grievous mourning," named that place "mourning of Egypt." (Gen 50:11). Joseph, his brothers, and the whole company of

mourners, after burying Jacob, returned to Egypt. Before he died, Joseph assured his family in Egypt that God would come to take them out of Egypt and back to the land God promised their ancestors, and he made them swear that then, “you shall carry up my bones from here.” (Gen 50:25).

After Joseph’s death, his father’s family, the Israelites, became so numerous and strong that the Egyptians, afraid for their own security, oppressed them ruthlessly with forced labor and made their lives bitter, even to the point of killing their male children, to try to keep them subdued (Exodus 1). Thus, their time in Egypt became a time of grief; they “groaned under their slavery and cried out . . . for help . . .” (Ex 2:23). God, hearing their cry and seeing their oppression, called Moses to lead their liberation from slavery: their exodus from Egypt (Ex 2:24; 3:7, 9-10).

The exodus itself came about because of the grief of the Egyptians at their suffering from the plagues, especially the death of their firstborn (Ex 12:29-32). The Israelites’ faithlessness during the exodus led to its being prolonged to forty years of wandering and suffering. In this period they complained, murmured and received God’s judgment that they would all (except Joshua and Caleb) die before the Promised Land was reached, and they mourned (Nm 14:22-39). Finally, at the end of the forty years, Moses, too, died, and the new generation of Israelites mourned his death before Joshua led them forward into the Promised Land (Dt 34:7-8).

Elements of mourning found in these and other Old Testament narratives include: tearing clothes, weeping, wailing, fasting, putting on sackcloth, walking in procession, laying on the ground, holding on to the body and kissing it. These actions of the Israelites were expected and approved.

Biblical restrictions on mourning, such as not to cut oneself, nor to shave one's head (Dt 14:1-2), reflect a strong aversion to imitating the practices of the Canaanites, who worshipped other gods. In Jer 16:4-9, mourning, burial, lamentation and especially gashing, shaving the head and eating a meal (*marzeah*) to honor the dead or console the mourners are all forbidden. The meal was not the same as present day bereavement meals. As practiced by the Canaanites it was a ritual meal, involving worship of Ba'al and other Canaanite gods and goddesses, excessive drunkenness, sexual entertainment and communication with dead ancestors.<sup>10</sup>

The priests of Israel were prohibited from participating in funerals, except those of their closest family members, because contact with a dead body would make them unclean, unable to make offerings to the LORD. They were likewise prohibited from shaving their heads, cutting off the edges of their beards or gashing themselves (Lv 21:1-5), which were Canaanite funeral practices.<sup>11</sup>

Mourning can be corporate, as well as individual, as when the people mourned the deaths of patriarchs, kings and other public figures. Public mourning can include professional mourners.

God can prohibit mourning because there is no hope. Concerning children born in the land of Judah, and their parents, The LORD, through the prophet Jeremiah, says:

They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth. . . . Do not enter the house of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 112-113, 117, 132-133.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 129.

mourning, or go to lament, or bemoan them; for I have taken away my peace from this people, ... my steadfast love and mercy.  
(Jer 16:4-5)

But Jesus prohibited mourning because of the priority of discipleship. To the disciple who first wanted to go and bury his father, Jesus said, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Mt 8:21-22). He also discouraged misplaced mourning, when the women were beating their breasts and wailing for him at his crucifixion, saying, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." (Lk 23:27-28).

The Christian hope influences the quality of grief: "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." (1 Thes 4:13). In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Mt 5:4).

On several occasions, Jesus brought an end to grief and mourning by restoring life, as when he raised Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:23-24, 35-43), the young man of Nain (Lk 7:11-16), and Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44). Restoring their deceased loved ones to life, out of his compassion and mercy, Jesus brought to these grieving families joy to replace their sorrow. These are accounts of resuscitations; the persons who were restored to life would die again. Jesus was demonstrating his power over life and death, giving these *signs* of the permanent resurrection that would come in and through himself.

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